The future of electronic entertainment issue#97

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PlayStation | PS2 | N64 | Dreamcast | PC | XBox | GameCube

XBox in Japan: Tokyo Game Show in detail

Previewed: Halo, Ampe Operation Flashpoint

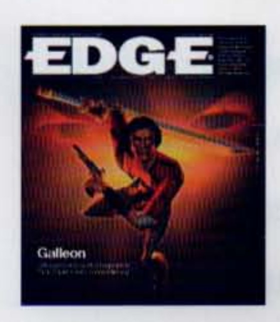
Reviewed: Ring Of Red, Desperados, GB F-Zero, Castlevania and Super Mario

Plus: Edge Awards 200

Galleon

"We wanted to beat what happened in Tomb Raider in every conceivable way"





Western-developed consoles have never cut the mustard in Japan. Sure, platforms such as 3DO's Multiplayer garnered software support from some of the country's more experimental outfits (no doubt spurred into action, in part, because of the significant hardware involvement of Panasonic, a substantial arm of one of the world's technological superpowers, Matsushita). But it always seemed like little more than a token gesture. How, then, could Microsoft, whose PC endeavours have traditionally been been cast aside by the nation, even hope to gain a foothold in this territory? The answer, in part, lay in Microsoft president Bill Gates' keynote speech at the autumn Tokyo Game Show. Could the revelation that Sega had committed to bringing 11 titles to the XBox platform whip TGS attendees into a frenzy? In short, the answer was no.

Perhaps galvanised by the whooping and hollering that usually greets large-scale game announcements on American soil (thanks, perhaps, to native attendees getting a whiff of the barmaid's apron beforehand), Gates may well look back on his TGS speech with no small amount of disappointment. Which is not to say that Microsoft's showing at the event lacked commitment: having Sega on board in such a vocal fashion counts for a great deal, while Tecmo's decision to make *Dead Or Alive 3* an XBox first is testament to the Japanese development community's willingness to invest in the American dream. (Koei, one of Japan's most vocal supporters of PS2, has pledged commitment to XBox, too.)

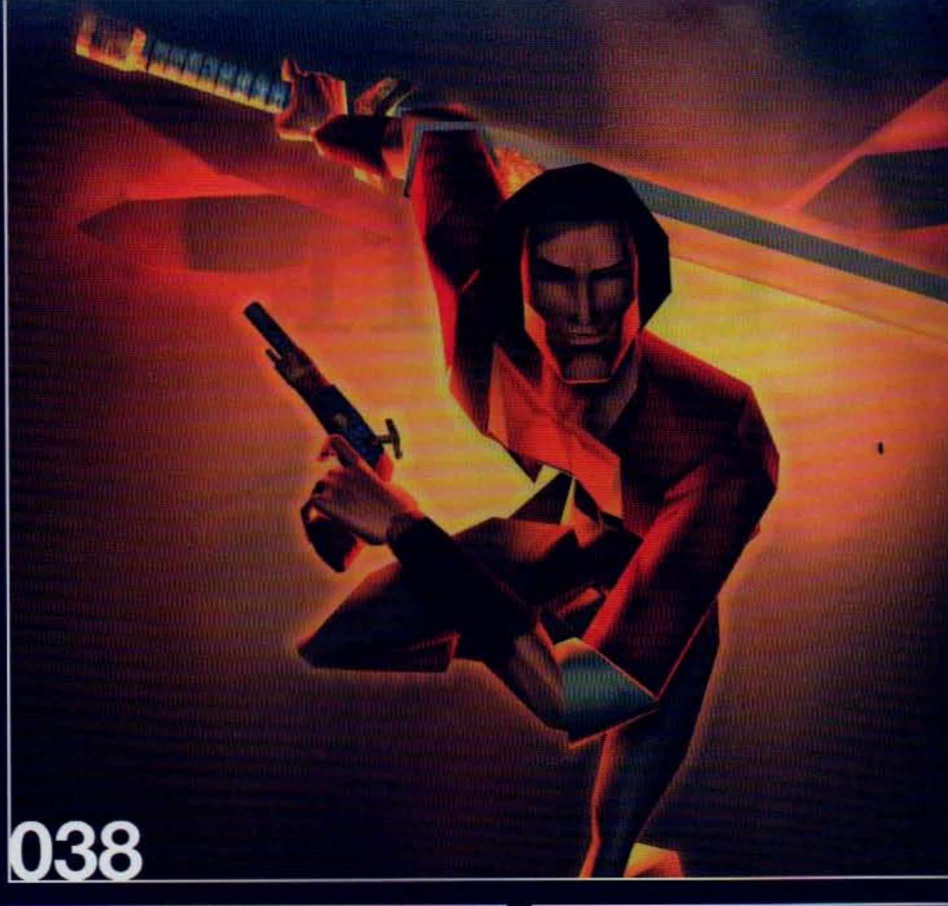
A western console manufacturer has never taken such drastic steps in courting Japanese support as Microsoft. Did you ever see Trip Hawkins or Sam Tramiel holding aloft a 3DO or Jaguar joypad alongside a no-doubt-nourishing Japanese-produced hamburger on fast-food restaurant paper mats? No. But perhaps wily old Bill (below) is a little bit more aware of the power of global marketing.

Closer to home, this month **Edge** takes an exclusive look at *Galleon* (see p38), a game which may well end up on XBox. It seems exactly the sort of game that will travel...



Features







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Prescreen













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"Stay out of my way, or you'll pay. Listen to what I say."

frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge

XBox lands in Japan at muted TGS

Microsoft makes moves to charm the Japanese public; Sega unveils XBox titles, Sony keeps its head down; Nintendo revels in the success of the GBA launch; WonderSwan limps on

Most showgoers took the trouble to drop by Microsoft's stand, although excitement levels did not burst through Makuhari Messe's roof

Comaparisons between the TGS and ECTS ring true: "Every year," says one Japanese regular to **Edge**, "it gets worse and worse, smaller and smaller. This year is no exception". Harsh words, but in time of country-wide recession, it's becoming increasingly difficult to excite the Japanese populace with new, hi-res, expensive trinkets. Perhaps this explains why it was Nintendo – despite no GameCube presence, and the promise of its own show in two weeks' time – that emerged from TGS 2001 as the only party whose hardware future is assured. With just about every company showing GBA titles in some form or other, and most games finishing the day with crowds several people deep, the handheld machine was predictably popular.

Still, there were other stands deemed worthy of attention by the discerning Tokyo public, most notably the hefty XBox presence – the main feature being a hydraulic stage featuring four Japanese dancing girls clad in sculpted rubber XBox outfits. Despite that, the focus of the crowd's interest was the machine itself, albeit in a sense that suggested it as a western curio. One stand, fronted by 11 XBox dev kits and a massive poster boasting of the machine's capabilities, made clear Microsoft's intentions to persist in wooing Japanese developers. Though the size of the machine found few friends, the redesigned controller seemed to fare better.

Downsized XBox hardware

Microsoft's decision to downsize the XBox peripheral for the Japanese market saw a host of eastern journalists performing hand-size comparisons with western colleagues. A glass case showed the genesis of the controller, from wood carving through plastic prototype to finished model, and also provided the only opportunity to see the two input devices side by side. Though it's certainly slimmer than its Western counterpart, it's by no means anorexic: the layout remains much the same, with the black and white buttons moving from above the four coloured ones to below, and Start and Select repositioned to the far left side of the pad. The much-criticised D-pad, too, has been superficially remodeled with an indented vertical cross rather than an angled X, though it remains of the cheaper circular style, and may still prove inadequate for precision digital input.









Bill Gates delivers his keynote address (top), outlining the differences evident in the Japanese controller. XBox's ADSL and Optical Broadband Adapters (above)



The XBox controller has been significantly altered for Japan. It's no longer as close in shape to Sega's Dreamcast joypad, and several buttons have been moved around





Resembling a micro hi-fi unit, Microsoft's Broadband Adapter is integral to its XBox dream. Maybe it's just the presence of an LCD display, but it's a sexy component

If it does, then Microsoft's big software announcement, *Dead Or Alive 3*, may yet be undone. Claiming to be 'Realtime Demo v0.10330 powered by XBox', a five-minute showreel revealed a game which, while clearly of the same lineage of the Dreamcast version, demonstrated next-gen stylings far beyond those of Sega's machine. The emphasis seemed to be on polygon count rather than game dynamic, with segments showing fighters clashing on beaches surrounded by hundreds of gulls, and ice stalactites shattering as bodies collided with them in shimmering blue caverns. The inclusion of the meadow segment showing one character admiring copious amounts of dancing butterflies may have been a subtle allusion to one of Microsft's old XBox tech demos. Less subtle were the female fighters' ostentatious breast dynamics.

Microsoft's decision to downsize the XBox peripheral saw a host of eastern journalists performing hand-size comparisons with western colleagues

The Sega 11

Elsewhere, the software line-up seemed to leave Japanese gamers slightly cold. Sega's announcement that it had 11 titles in development (including *Jet Set Radio Future*, and new versions of *Gun Valkyrie*, *Sega GT*, and *Panzer Dragoon*) may have lifted the company's share price by seven per cent, but while there's still the possibility of seeing Sega games on the GameCube, it seems that's the route that most Japanese gamers prefer. Lengthy demonstrations of *Amped* and *NFL Fever* saw mild intrigue and polite applause, but little more. It was left to a freely distributed copy of *Famitsu XBox #0* to address those concerns, announcing new games (specifically the aforementioned *Dead Or Alive 3*, Koei's *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms*, RPGs *Ex-Chaser*, *Neverland Saga*, *Metal Dungeon*, *Master Slave*, and *Runebird*, a couple of anime games, and fashion/catwalk game *Style Factory*) and detailing the freshly announced online deal with NTT. The ADSL telecoms deal clearly forms a broad part of Microsoft's eastern strategy, something it's keen to stress in all Japanese XBox literature; it will not be part of the Internet, but a separate network designed to normalise the act of online gaming.

Sony's show a little lacklustre

Sony's presence at the TGS may have been larger in terms of pure floor space, but left the majority of visitors with a taste of the old rather than a promise of the new. Garnering the most attention was a big-screen demonstration of *GT3*, although the rolling *MGS2* demo drew crowds, too. **Edge**'s game of the show was also extremely popular; *Silent Hill 2*, shown for the first time in playable form, looked genuinely disturbing and beautifully produced, and benefited from being one of the few PS2 titles not to suffer from a distinct lack of anti-aliasing. In particular, games taking the Sega-pioneered cel-shaded route, like cartoon skateboard sim *Yanya Caballista Featuring Gawoo*, action/adventure title *DNA: Dark Native Apostle*, and the story-based *Flower, Sun, And Rain* all had painfully apparent jaggies. *Maken Shao* and *Hard Hitter* also suffered.

Elsewhere on the Sony stand, *Armored Core 2: Another Age* had the giant robot lovers in raptures, as did *Legend Of Cloudia: G-Breaker*. A huge screen showing *Ace Combat 04: Shattered Skies* drew crowds and impressed with its blend of arcade fighter pilot action and terrain realism. *Happy Diet: The Diet Simulator* also attracted its share of people to the PlayStation2 esoterica corner, thanks to its innovative Stairmaster peripheral. Also on view was a standard Pachinko game that boasted the second best title of the show – *Milky Bar And Killer Queen*; the best remained Jaleco's incomprehensible *SuperMicChan UltraHighTensionLovelyGirl!*, featuring a microphone peripheral and an air of exclamation-mark madness.

Square's playable *Final Fantasy X* attracted queues, and the big-screen trailer brought cinema-style crowds, but the *Final Fantasy VIII*-style character design still failed to capture the imagination of the Tokyo masses. Nothing in the demo surprised, either; the main differences appear to be the introduction of realtime-rendered explorable locations, sharper imagery, and the usual twofold increase in the overblown nature of the Guardian Force attacks. The same was true of Koei's *Kessen II*, which also seems nothing more than a slight progression from the previous game, featuring more attacks, more gorgeous FMV, and more supernatural spin on Japanese historical fact.

Handhelds hit the spot

Though the PS2 déjà vu undoubtedly caused a certain amount of apathy towards the Sony section of TGS, at the other end of the hall the reverse was true. Section seven of the Messe-Makuhari centre housed the majority of the GBA games, and was home





Edge's game of the show was *Silent Hill 2*, from KCET (above left). Elsewhere at the spring Tokyo Game Show, Microsoft made a big deal of its partnership with comms giant NTT



Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec (below) almost salvaged the event for Sony, but it was clear throughout that the company is still having difficulty unearthing PS2 killer apps















A definite software highlight of the show was *Project K-X*, an XBox beat 'em up from Dream Factory, the outfit previously responsible for the *Tobal* series. Its lighting and texture detail dropped jaws

to handheld heaven for retrogamers. Though the location was somewhat disadvantageous to Nintendo, Capcom, Konami et al, by the middle of the afternoon word had spread and crowds around the playable versions of *Super Street Fighter II X Revival* and *Final Fight One* were at a peak. Also on show was Nintendo's new music game, *Pocket Music* – 'For groovy boys and girls' – which, as well as offering a standard rhythm-action mode, promises a fourplayer link-up where each player takes control of a different instrument. This was effectively demonstrated by four pink-haired girls taking to a stage apparently set up for a live band; each went over to stand by one of the instruments, then produced GBAs and jammed through a version of Deep Purple's 'Smoke On The Water'.

Unsurprisingly, Bandai chose to shy away from such formidable opposition and took its WonderSwan Color to a different part of the arena. The company's main draws were a *Zelda*-style RPG, *Star Hearts*, and a network-based robot strategy game. Rumours of the WonderSwan's death seem overstated, with its continually well-received WonderWitch development kit and a good deal of interest in the *Final Fantasy* games demoed at the Square stand. However, regardless of its future, it was looking much healthier than the Neo-Geo Pocket, whose presence was confined to one fruit machine game and an enthusiastic SNK employee.

The Dreamcast's presence was also, understandably, much reduced. Though the hardcore beat 'em up fans queued for a game of *Capcom Vs SNK Millennium Fight 2000 Pro*, there was little else to indicate a prolonged life-support system for Sega's console. *Heavy Metal: Geomatrix*, a *Spawn*-clone with camera problems also duplicated, and the candy-sweet RPG *Eldorado Gate* were the pick of the rest, but failed to captivate. DoCoMo did little better; a stop-motion version of *Bomberman* and various plodding clones of shooters and arcade classics (*Scramble*, *Pac-Man*, and *Arkanoid*) disappointed, though the hardware itself proved to be of more interest and may yet prove to be the essential mode of communication for any self-respecting Setagaya-ku resident. Like most things at the show, its future is uncertain: with Microsoft's assault on the Japanese mindset still not assured success, and Sony's grip on the next generation looking increasingly unassured, TGS 2001 remained an event that asked more questions than it answered.

XBox rocks Gamestock

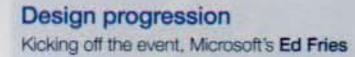
Microsoft reveals its forthcoming crop of PC console titles on home turf, before taking its firstparty products to the Tokyo Game Show

Before Bill Gates led Microsoft's charge at the Tokyo Game Show with his keynote speech, the software giant gave journalists the first glimpse of what the world can expect from its maiden foray into console hardware at its annual Gamestock event, held in Seattle in early March. Introducing the current crop of Microsoft's firstparty games on both PC and XBox, as well as holding panel discussions – one of which considered the future of PC gaming – undoubtedly the most important feature of the event was the opportunity to actually play some works in progress using the XBox controller. Although there was little

There was little to suggest that there is about to be a radical shake-up of existing genres, but there was a convincing amount of visual and gameplay quality, tied to crucial genres

to suggest that there is about to be a radical shake-up of existing genres, there was a convincing amount of visual and gameplay quality, tied to genres that are of crucial commercial significance.

Design progression

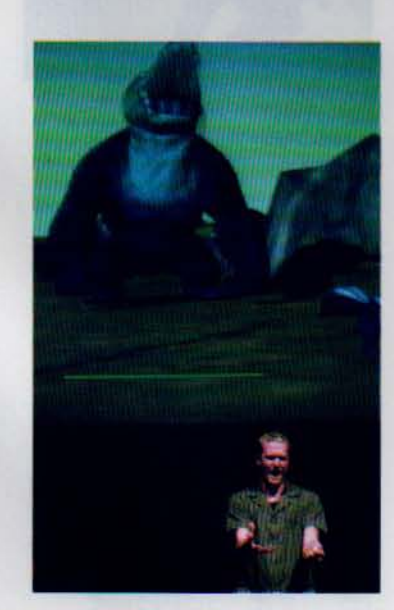


Kicking off the event, Microsoft's **Ed Fries** sought to draw attention to how far videogame design has progressed in the last 20 years (as well as presenting subsequent titles in the best possible light) by showing off one of his own designs, a respectable-for-4K *Frogger* clone, created for the Atari 800. But apart from this comic interlude he also argued that the videogame industry is on the cusp of reaching a hitherto untapped massmarket audience. Pointing to the sophistication of current game design and technology, he argued that the competition that is about to take place between Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft can only be good for game design and innovation. No doubt Microsoft will be hoping so, given the enormity of the impact of shifting to manufacturing hardware will have on its hitherto enormously successful business model.

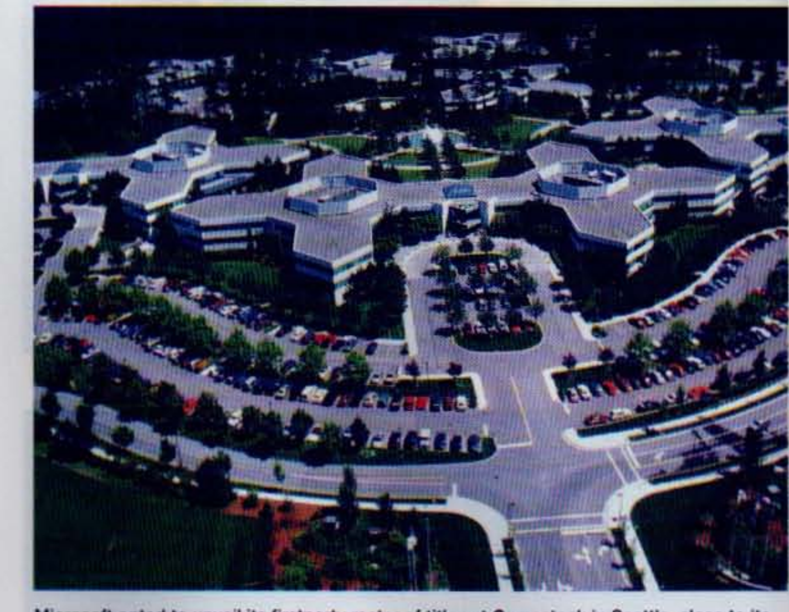
Anyone attending the event to survey Microsoft's PC offerings will, in all likelihood, have been disappointed. Although the titles on display were not lacking in terms of quality, in terms of quantity the meagre offering pointed to the fact that the company is currently devoting more thought to the early days of XBox. On the simulation front, the latest iteration of *Flight Simulator* promises an ever more legitimate experience, judging by the authentically loud display, while the Kuju-developed *Train Simulator* promises to be a panacea for aficionados of automotive authenticity. Elsewhere, *Mech Commander 2* provided a none-too-groundbreaking update for the RTS series, and *Zoo Tycoon* will allow fans of management sims to take the helm of – you've guessed it – a zoo. Finally *Dungeon Siege* promises to deliver *Diablo*-style gameplay with a hefty potential for user customisation, while *Sigma* is an RTS with a 'The Island Of Dr Moreau' theme, featuring units of hybrid mutants derived from real-world animals. On top of this sample of what PC gamers can expect in coming months, a panel discussion about the future of PC gaming proved equally inconclusive, with panellists undecided about the merits of input simplicity, though apparently unanimous that the quality of a game is determined by commercial success – not a view that **Edge** ascribes to.

XBox ups its stock

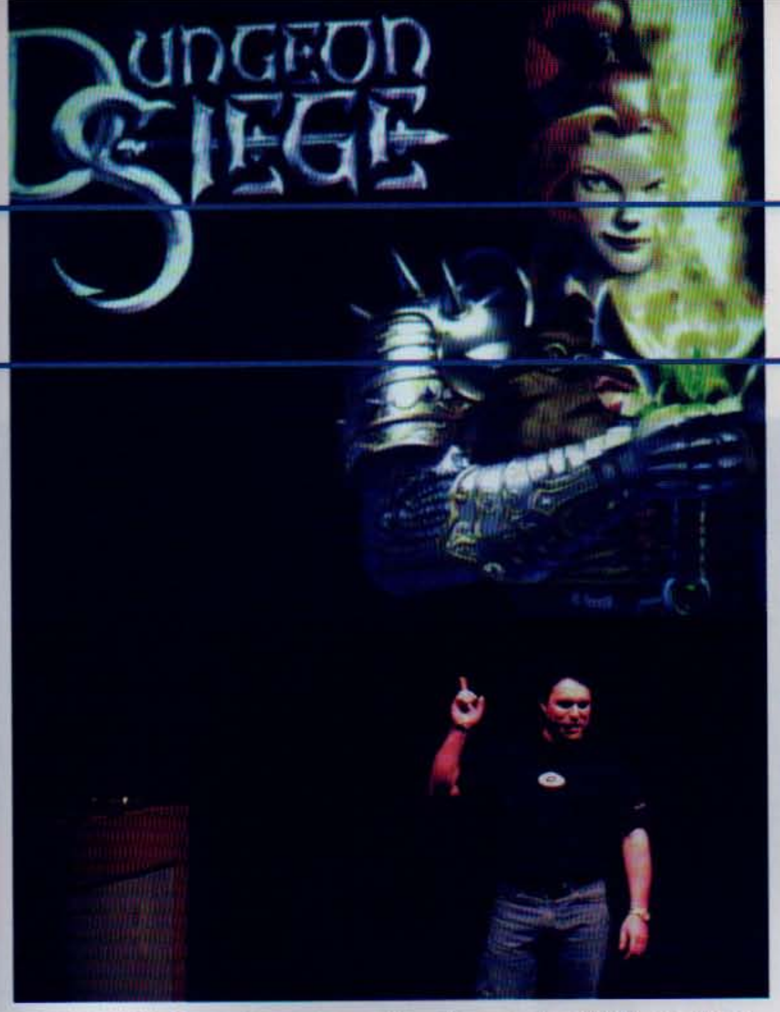
In stark contrast, it is difficult to see how anyone attending to get a taste of XBox software will have been disappointed, despite the generally negative feedback that surfaced on the Net after the event. Granted, there was little in the way of innovation. Most titles fell firmly into an



Oddworld Inhabitants' Lorne Lanning (left) proved a great hit, providing live sounds effects for his demo a good one. Alex Garden, of Relic Entertainment, showed off RTS *Sigma*



Microsoft opted to unveil its firstparty roster of titles at Gamestock in Seattle, close to its XBox campus base (above). On this showing, the console has every chance in the world



Chris Taylor of Gas Powered Games is currently working on fantasy RPG *Dungeon Siege*, which has an action-oriented spin he believes will take the genre to a new level

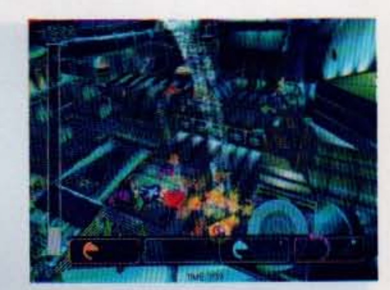
existing genre, and it is telling that the most difficult to categorise, *Fuzion Frenzy*, received little support from Microsoft. Passing off a rendered image as an ingame screenshot also did little to enamour Internet critics. But judging from the final teaser showreel, as well as that shown when the official XBox logo was unveiled last year, there is still time for more groundbreakingly different titles to appear. At the moment, Microsoft seems more keen to demonstrate that it will have commercially viable titles ready for launch. Which, judging by the titles on show, it will have. *Amped* is comparable to *Tony Hawk's* on snow, and is already very playable; *NFL Fever* is an American Football title that likewise is already looking accomplished; *Project Gotham*, one of the biggest announcements, is a reworked *Metropolis: Street Racer*, which will add New York to its sumptuously detailed city tracks; and Oddworld continues to wow spectators. As is to be expected, all were visually resplendent. More importantly, each featured intuitive gameplay, and allayed fears that developers might be inclined to simply attempt to map keyboards onto the XBox controller. Instead, controls were kept simple across the board, and the controller acquitted itself very well.

While there were disappointments in the shape of the cliché-ridden *Azurik* and undistinguished *Nightcaster*, the unveiling of the console-flavoured *Halo* suggested that there may yet be a killer app at launch. There is still some confusion surrounding the PC launch of the title, and if it does appear it is unlikely to do so within a year of the XBox version, but in any case the game seems tailored for console-style play.

More problematic for Microsoft will be the challenge of dominating the Japanese market. "Building a successful console business really requires that you be successful in Japan," noted Fries before unveiling the Japanese development team, headed by Toshiyuki Miyata, ex of Sony. However, it wasn't until TGS that a clearer indication of the console's prospects in Japan appeared.



Microsoft's Ed Fries stressed that he understands the importance of Japan







Clockwise from top left: snowboard freestyler *Amped*; the difficult-to-pigeonhole *Fuzion Frenzy*; *Metropolis Street Racer* remake *Project Gotham*; Oddworld Inhabitants' seemingly evergreen *Munch's Oddysee*; *Nightcaster*; already-promising gridiron game *NFL Fever*; potential XBox killer app *Halo*; and the somewhat predictable *Azurik*

Microsoft gears up at GDC

XBox and online gaming were the big talking points in San Jose as developers look to the future and upcoming console hardware



Deus Ex **creator Warren Spector opens the Game Developers Choice Awards at GDC in his role as board member of IGDA**

Six months after the US PlayStation2 launch, the most surprising feature of the Game Developers Conference was Sony's low profile. A headline in the local newspaper, *The San Jose Mercury*, summed up the mood, at least among Sony developers: PlayStation2 shortage sets slow mood at conference. On the show's exhibition floor, where even Sega managed to rustle up a half-decent stand, Sony's only representatives were a couple of AIBO robotic dogs. Similarly, there were few PlayStation2 development experts giving lectures in the tutorial programme, and the majority of these were audio specialists.

PS2 quiet: XBox all-action

Partly this is because, with first- and second-generation PlayStation2 games already well underway, there is little new to talk about. But with the battle between Sony and Microsoft for the hardcore 18-to-35 demographic about to begin, the lack of enthusiasm among developers for PlayStation2 should concern Sony.

In contrast, XBox's Advanced Technology Group was out in force, including appearances from Seamus Blackley, Chanel Summers, and Michael Abrash, winning over hearts and minds. Microsoft's head of games Ed Fries was present, too.

It seems clear that in North America, at least, Microsoft has gained the upper hand with developers even before it has announced the consumer details of its XBox launch. It was XBox and its hardware component partners that were the main focus on the exhibition hall, too, with the bright green of NVidia and the blue of Intel prominent on the show floor. NVidia's GeForce3 chipset in particular attracted plenty of attention, as the graphics company continued to wow developers with demonstrations of the flexibility and power of vertex and pixel shaders. Intel announced a VTune performance analyser for XBox's Pentium III CPU, and the vast majority of the development tool companies took the opportunity to announce the migration of their support to include XBox development as well.

Nintendo keeps a low profile

Nintendo's profile, prior to its GameCube E3



announcement, remained low. MetroWerks and SN Systems were showing off their GameCube debugging tools for the first time, and both had blue Dolphin dev boxes tucked away out of sight and the reach of wandering hands of jealous studio bosses. "We can demo the debugger, but we're not allowed to display any graphical output," commented SN Systems. It had its Game Boy Advance ProDG development tools and hardware on show, albeit in an all-wires-exposed alpha form.

Technical matters

The Game Developers Conference is as much about the development community as it is business and hardware, however. So, in addition to the show floor, there were two days of technical tutorials, followed by three days of lectures. The troubled state of the game industry was also reflected in the full attendance at the job fair.

Strategies for running online gaming communities, especially massively multiplayer games, proved to be one of the big conference issues, despite the announcement that EA was canning *Ultima Worlds Online: Origin*. Raph Koster and Rich Vogel, who head the development team on *Star Wars Galaxies* at Sony owned-developer Verant, spoke at length on the challenges of bringing the 'Star Wars' property into a massively online environment. Amy Jo Kim, a consultant for EA on *The Sims Online*, revealed some of the thinking behind leveraging the franchise's casual appeal into the online space.



Will Wright won the lifetime achievement award for games such as *Sim City* and *Sim Ant*, while his current project *The Sims* picked up two awards. Wright also talked about the challenges of taking *The Sims* online

GDC Europe

Following the 15-year success of the GDC in America, this year sees the launch of its European counterpart by CMP Europe. The Game Developer Conference Europe (GDCE) will take place on August 31 and September 1 at London's ExCeL exhibition venue, shortly before ECTS is due to kick off at the same venue, and will follow a similar format to its US counterpart.

"The US conference has proved over the last 15 years that it's the biggest global event exclusively for game development professionals to meet and share the ideas, skills and experience needed to create the next generation of interactive entertainment," explains **Andy Lane**, director of CMP Europe's Games Division. "More than 6,000 developers visit ECTS every year – and the addition of the Developer's Area and Lounge at last year's show was a big hit. Together, these highlight the need for an event like GDC Europe, and imply that it's likely to be a great success. We'll be working in conjunction with our US colleagues to ensure we deliver a top-class programme tailored to the needs of European developers."

Like the American event, GDCE will host lectures, tutorials, panels, and roundtables covering all aspects of game development across multiple platforms, headed by a number of industry luminaries. Although an advisory board for the event is currently being finalised, it already includes Sony's Phil Harrison, Argonaut's Jez San, Martin de Ronde of Lost Boys Games, Charles Cecil of Revolution Software, Chris Van Der Kuyl from Vis Interactive, Rebellion's Jason Kingsley, and Demis Hassabis of Elixir Studios.





With eight lecture tracks running alongside the expo and job fair, there was plenty to do at GDC (below)



SN Systems showed its Game Boy Advance dev tools and hardware at GDC in all-wires-exposed alpha form

Wright: toast of the conference

Indeed, it was *The Sims* creator Will Wright who was the toast of the conference. As well as giving an inspirational lecture entitled 'Design Plunder', Wright won the lifetime achievement award, while *The Sims* team won the excellence in programming and game of the year awards in the Game Developers Choice Awards.

Another emerging aspect of game development proved to be convergent platforms such as mobile phones, PDAs, and online games using *Java*, *Shockwave* and other cross-platform technologies. The big announcements in these areas included Sun Microsystem's initiative to create de facto API standards for *Java* games, Motorola's consolidated wireless entertainment server and Macromedia's new *3D Shockwave* engine (see Codeshop for more details). Palm had examples of its new m505 device and was encouraging developers to create content for Palm OS. There were also signs that the American market is opening up to the potential of mobile gaming, with US companies such as Plazmic and Comverse demonstrating their vision of the future. Digital Bridges' designer Adam Mayes and RJ Mical (of Amiga fame), who is now at Ericsson-owned startup Red Jade, gave lectures on mobile gaming.

Graphics engines proved to be a hot topic, with the likes of LithTech and NDL unveiling new iterations of existing technology, while newcomer Intrinsic announced its Alchemy platform. UK tools companies made a splash, too, with Criterion pulling out all the stops to launch its *RenderWare* platform. Building on the 2D and 3D rendering abilities of the original *RenderWare* engine, it has added an in-house physics API and an audio engine with 3D sound courtesy of Sensaura. MathEngine's *Karma* physics engine looked good, with a rigid-body firstperson shooter demo particularly impressive.



CALIVE! 2001

Computer Arts magazine has announced the date and venue of its annual live event, CALIVE! 2001. This year's event will be held from October 10-12 at the Business Design Centre in Islington. Last year's event featured presentations by several design industry representatives, including Corps Business, Blueberry, The Mill, and Phil McNally, and this year's event looks set to be even bigger. Tickets are £8 in advance, or £16 on the door. To sign up for the CALIVE! 2001 newsletter go to www.computerartslive.co.uk, or check out *Computer Arts* magazine for the latest updates.



Despite PlayStation2's time lead over XBox, it was Microsoft's console that got developers excited at GDC



Big names turn out for TIGA launch

A raft of top developers join with Goverment representatives to mark the inception of a trade association for the videogame industry designed to offer creatives support and commercial advice

Some of the British videogame industry's biggest names turned out on March 8 to witness the launch of the Independent Games Developers Association (TIGA) at the DTI conference centre in London. At a crucial time for an industry whose competitive landscape is undergoing a sea change with the entrance of the world's largest software company into the console domain as well as the impact of wireless communications technology, the new trade association hopes to offer a framework of commercial advice that will enable UK developers to focus on creative success.

E-Minister **Patricia Hewitt** joined the likes of founding members Ian Baverstock, Jez San, and Jason Kingsley, as well as Microsoft's Sandy Duncan and the DTI's Chris Matthews on a panel of speakers which discussed issues affecting the British development community, ranging from outside investment to the proportion of women employed in the industry and the effects of piracy. A report by Simon Terrington of research group Human Capital was both entertaining and informative, while an entry-level guide to securing outside financing presented by investment bank Beeson-Gregory's Julian Morse proved particularly telling about the relative business maturity of the industry, going some way to explain why foreign companies have been able to inflate their acquisitive ability at the expense of the British industry.





E-Minister Patricia Hewitt (left), joined the likes of Jez San to give her approval to the association

Contribution to UK economy

"The UK games development industry is expanding and maturing into a key sector in the economy," noted Hewitt. "We have a world-class reputation as a creative and technical centre of excellence in games development. TIGA will help our companies to compete more effectively by encouraging innovation and sharing knowledge."

Although the body's principle purpose is to provide professional advice for its members, it should also prove to be a useful platform to educate the investment community and academic institutions, and, above all, the public about the idiosyncracies of the videogame industry and videogames themselves. And though DTI representatives were wary of promising too much, the possibility of lobbying for tax breaks akin to the film industry's was also raised by members in a bid to encourage a climate conducive to investment.





Speakers at the launch event were introduced by Nigel Davies (above) of Blitz Games, one of 12 founder members

Membership structure

The organisation offers a three-tiered membership structure. Full members have the widest voting rights and are eligible to elect up to 12 members of TIGA's board of directors, and the cost varies depending upon the size of the developer applying for membership. Those who don't fulfil the criteria for full membership may become associate members at a reduced cost, though they will only be able to vote for two members of the board. Finally, companies that are commercially connected to the game development industry but are ineligible for either full or associate membership can become affiliate members, who possess no voting rights.

> "The UK games development industry is expanding and maturing into a key sector in the economy. We have a world-class reputation for creative and technical excellence"

It's about time that the British development community itself began to tackle problems such as poor provision of training, or the relatively insignificant proportion of women or ethnic minorities working in the industry, and **Edge** is optimistic that TIGA can provide the forum to do so, providing it doesn't become bogged down by the politics of ego. More information can be found on TIGA's Web site at www.tiga.org.uk



Game Boy advances

Nintendo launches its next-gen handheld in Japan, shifting more than half a million units in four days



Nintendo has plans to breath still more life into *Pokémon* with a GBA card reader

GBA software sales

According to trade paper *MCV* and its media partner Media Create, Nintendo managed to sell 531,000 units of Game Boy Advance hardware during the week ending March 25 after four days on sale. The following chart shows the software sales for the top ten games over the same period, to the nearest thousand units:

Title	Sales
1. Super Mario Advance	159,000
2. F-Zero	80,000
3. Power Pro Kun	77,000
4. Yugioh	56,000
5. Rockman EXE	46,000
6. Mr Driller 2	42,000
7. Kuru Kuru Kururin	34,000
8. Castlevania	23,000
9. Napoleon	14,000
10. Wai Wai Racing	13,000

Before going on to wow gamers jaded by the current crop of next-generation gaming technology at the Tokyo Game Show, Nintendo's Game Boy Advance was launched on March 21 to a relatively muted response in the Akihabara gaming district.

Owing to an immensely successful preorder scheme the locus of launch commotion was shifted to Japan's department stores, which received the majority of the 2.7m preordered units. The scenes there were more typical of the launch of a significant piece of new hardware, with many parents being turned away to wait for the second shipment of preordered units, which arrived on March 30. Unsurprisingly, a limited run of 50,000 metallic blue units, which were only on sale at Nintendo's two *Pokémon* centres, promptly sold out.

Prior to the launch, the new hardware was on display at a special exhibition organised by Nintendo to outline its plans for the platform and allow a hands-on demonstration of the launch software. With the US launch date now set for June 11, and the European release scheduled to take place 11 days later, the company is predicting global sales of 24m units by March next year. With titles such as *Super Mario Brothers 2* and *3*, *Yoshi's Island*, *Yoshi's Story*, *Wario Land 4*, and *Metroid* all heading for portability, there's certainly likely to be a captive audience. And, of course, there's always Pokémon. Although the phenomenon surely can't last forever, a new card reader adaptor planned for the beginning of 2002 that will enable *Pokémon* trading cards to interact with the Game Boy Advance is likely to give it new impetus.

For western gamers who can't wait until the end of June, importers are offering the Game Boy Advance for between £140 and £150, with software cartridges going for between £44 and £59. **Edge**'s own first impressions of the device are overwhelmingly positive, reviving fond 8bit and 16bit memories, even if the unit is configured for relatively small hands.



While Akihabara – traditionally Tokyo's gaming district – was relatively quiet for the Game Boy Advance launch, a preorder system meant department stores were overrun









GAME BOY ADVANCE™

Forthcoming and hot GBA titles, top row, left to right: *Mario Kart Advance*; *Monster Guardian*; *Napoleon*; *Rockman EXE*. The launch was publicised with window displays (right), and Nintendo trumpets GBA's 32bits on the box (far right)







Nokia: connecting gamers

New batch of WAP phones launched featuring enhanced versions of old favourites and taking content to a new highwater mark



The Nokia 9210 Communicator runs the EPOC operating platform, boasts a full-colour screen, and the company claims it has the processing power of a 486 PC

Nokia has unveiled two new WAP-enabled handsets that may be of interest to gamers. The Nokia 3330 will give gamers the opportunity to while away those waiting-room hours with a scrolling shoot 'em up called *Space Impact*, as well as an upgraded version of the well-established *Snake*. The handset also enables access to WAP games offered by service providers. New levels and upgrades can be downloaded from the company's Club Nokia Web site.

More interesting, though, is the Nokia 9210 Communicator, which runs on the EPOC operating platform and boasts a full-colour screen. Comparable to a 486 PC in terms of processing power, UK manager of business development at Nokia, Mark Squires, is keen to point out that the device marks a shift in the company's focus towards facilitating content. By offering the Symbian Crystal Toolkit to developers free of charge on the company's Web site, he hopes that the device will be home to potentially hundreds of games.

Among the first of these is a colour snowboarding game, published by Nokia to coincide with its sponsorship of the Snowboarding FIS World Cup Finals taking place in Finland.



Nokia's *Virtually Board Snowboarding*

"With 32bit processing and a variety of snowboarding game features such as multiple game modes including trick race, half pipe and big air, the *Virtually Board Snowboarding* game offers players an action-packed videogame experience on a mobile phone," posits **Graham Thomas**, general manager of games at Nokia. Allowing up to two players to take control of one of four characters and five boards, the game is a hint of the type of offering to come on wireless handsets in the near future.

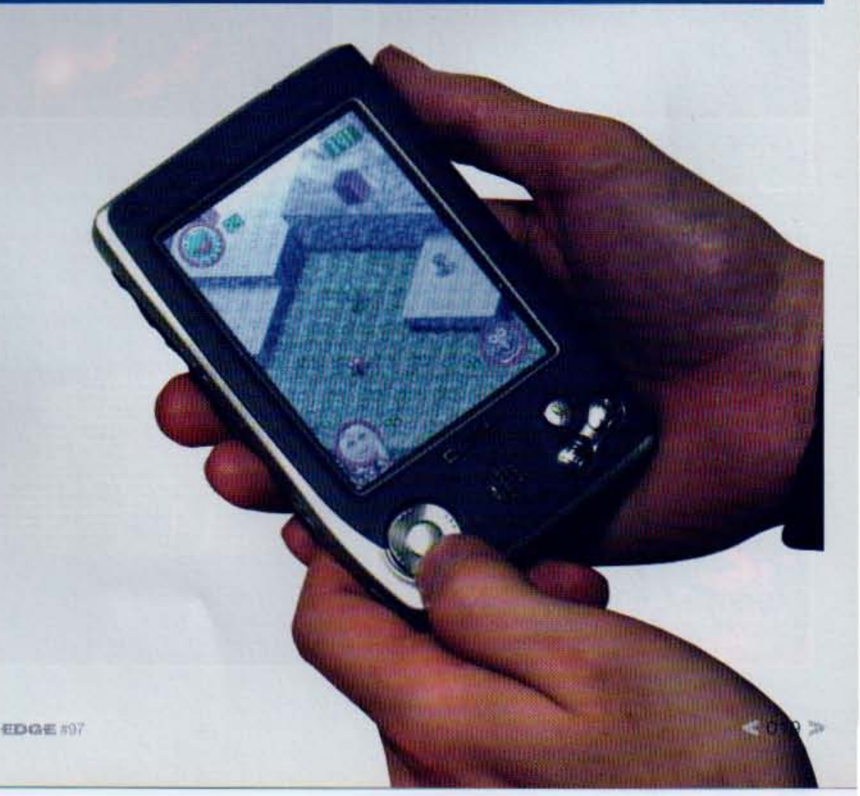
Wanova by wireless gaming

Recently formed company unveils its multiplayer mobile games solution alongside Nokia at CeBIT and keeps its nerve in the face of 3G worries

One of the latest entrants to join the wireless gaming land grab, Wanova, which was formed last year, unveiled its multiplayer mobile games solution in conjunction with Nokia at the CeBIT exhibition at the end of March. Rather than developing titles itself, Wanova aims to provide an outsourced solution to network operators and publishers and developers alike. Targeted specifically at next-generation GPRS and UMTS telecom networks, the company aims to provide technology that will enable developers to create games for more advanced handsets and PDAs without worrying about billing or software compatibility.

"The addition of high-quality graphics capabilities to single- and multiplayer mobile gaming will enable games publishers to deliver their titles into a whole new market," stated CEO **Walter Deffor**. And while some analysts are suggesting that the inflated price paid by network operators for 3G wireless network licenses will stymie the development of wireless gaming, Deffor is still optimistic, arguing that the need to recoup their investment gives these operators a vested interest in ensuring its success.

As a platform-agnostic technology, Wanova should be well placed for the influx of developers and publishers upon the rollout of advanced handsets and network technologies, regardless of the revenue models for the distribution of wireless games. And, like Nokia's snowboarding game, the Wanova demo that was seen running at CeBIT featuring characters from 'The Muppets', points to the potential of future generations of wireless gaming.



OUT THERE

REPORTAGE



The ICA's new exhibition will be essential for *Final Fantasy* fans. (Hankies and popcorn not included)



With a running time of 120 minutes, the Lens Flare movie will showcase cutting-edge game visuals







An acquired taste, for sure, Abbot's latest C64 compilation is perhaps best for Walkmans only



01 Tonight's feature: FMV

UK: The artistry evident in videogames is about to be dignified in a new exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. Organised by onedotzero and sponsored by PlayStation2, the Lens Flare event will include footage from *Onimusha Warlords*, *Independence War 2*, *Jet Set Radio*, and *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*. Screened in the comfort of a cinema auditorium and enhanced with Dolby surround sound, the venue should truly highlight the quality and efforts expended in the area of digitally constructed narrative. The Lens Flare festival runs from April 28 to May 5. Visit www.onedotzero.com for further details.

02 SID prepares for live gig

UK: Compiled and remixed by retro music fan Nick Abbot, 'Back in Time 3' is an audio feast for fans of the Commodore SID 6581 soundchip. Including synthetically enhanced tunes from such C64 titles as *Agent X 2*, *Shadowfire*, and *Wizball*, the compilation has been produced with the assistance of all the original authors. To celebrate the CD's launch a special Back in Time Live event will be taking place in Birmingham on May 16 at Club DNA, with composers Jeff Minter, Tony Crowther and Ben Daglish in attendance. Visit www.c64audio.com for more information.

Soundbytes

"It is young, single males with too little homework, no girlfriend, and few outdoor hobbies who seemed to be in the mind of the game's developer."

The Daily Telegraph's **Andy Goldberg** finds an easy target

"Overall the [online gaming] experience was akin to reading a foreign language in which I could make out the letters, but could not understand a word."

Andy Goldberg finds himself an easy target

"'It makes me feel like I'm a character in the game', said Ryo, a 22-year-old student with green hair, tinted Lennon glasses, and a Victorian velvet cloak. She was dressed as Roberia Carly, a character from Sega's *Sakura Taisen III* action game"

BBC Online reports the most salient news from TGS

"It's too big for Japanese homes. That's a tea table, not a video[games] machine"

An independent retailer expresses concerns about the XBox's chances in Japan

"One British study surveyed found that such computer 'geeks' who had been hooked on games for at least five years were highly intelligent, motivated and achieving people, but often misunderstood."

The Guardian reports on recent Home Office research

03 The gee-gees on GBA

Japan: As yet, publishers have yet to sully the beauty that is Game Boy Advance with any sellout titles, so punters can look forward to link-up play on *Super Street Fighter II Advance*, RPG classic *Breath Of Fire*, or even the arcade-perfect *Final Fight* (apart from being smaller than the arcade version, obviously). Those aside, there's always the well-known horse race sim *Winning Post*.

04 Psychedelic spaceman

UK: It may hurt the eyes after sustained play, but *Spheres Of Chaos* is worth all the effort. Iain McLeod's psychedelic take on *Asteroids* adds an assortment of power-ups and graphical effects to the classic formula. Shoot a rock crystal and it is as likely to leak liquid pixels as explode in a shower of space dust. A demo of this PC underground gem can be downloaded from www.chaotica.u-net.com.

05 Fast track to the Dark side

UK: From space-trading epics to fantasy RPGs, Fast Track Software's DarkBASIC offers would-be coders the chance to get their first foothold in the industry. Knowledge of C++ or assembly are no longer necessary to begin building rich 3D worlds. While unlikely to worry John Carmack, DarkBASIC's Command Line Interface and step-by-step tutorials allow the construction of commendable games within hours. More complex gameplay experiences are dependent on the imagination and perseverance of the individual. Expect a comprehensive **Edge** feature on home-brew development kits soon, but in the meantime DarkBASIC can be purchased for your PC from www.totaldb.com for £40.

Data Stream

Units of *Pokémon Red*, *Blue*, *Yellow*, *Gold*, and *Silver* sold worldwide to date, according to Nintendo: **48 million**

Number of *Pokémon Yellow* units currently selling per week in Europe: **150,000**

Country which has recently banned *Pokémon* merchandise due to the perceived representation of religious iconography: **Saudi Arabia**

Number of unique Web pages currently available on the World Wide Web, according to Google.com: **1.4bn**

Percentage of unique Web pages which Google.com found to be dedicated to porn: **12 per cent**

Number one search topic at www.google.com: **sex**

Number ten search topic at www.google.com: **porno**

Royalty cost to publishers per XBox disc, according to a leaked Microsoft document: **¥750 (£4.32)**

Biggest-selling Game Boy Advance title one week after the Japanese launch: ***Super Mario Advance*** **(220,100 units)**

Second-biggest-selling Game Boy Advance title one week after launch: ***F-Zero Advance*** **(74,450 units)**

Number of Sega games announced for XBox at the Tokyo Game Show: **11**

Number of new WonderSwan Color games announced at the Tokyo Game Show: **24**



More a test of luck than skill, *Winning Post* is no doubt getting a lot of businessmen excited in Japan



Dragon punches and hundred-hand slaps on GBA. Boots will be doing a fine trade in plasters



Arcade-perfect pocket gaming comes courtesy of Nintendo, though without the expensive cabinet

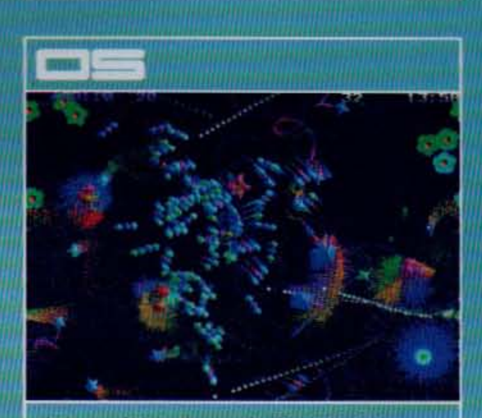


Breath Of Fire should be a perfect tonic for gaming palettes jaded by the overuse of FMV in RPGs

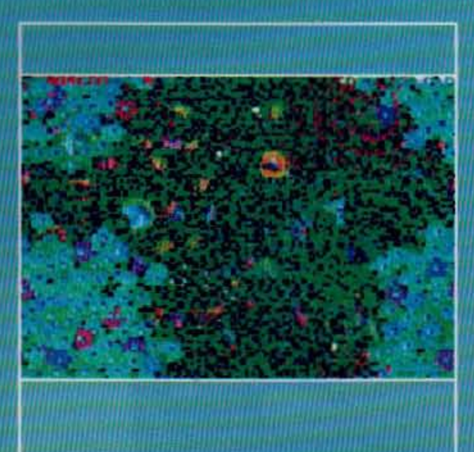




DarkBASIC gives new coders the ideal opportunity to create that killer snow-ski simulator



In terms of triptastic-ness, Ian Mcleod's *Spheres Of Chaos* is a serious rival to *Tempest 3000*





Snap'n'fix modelling has never been so much fun. Certain Gundam models are even transformable

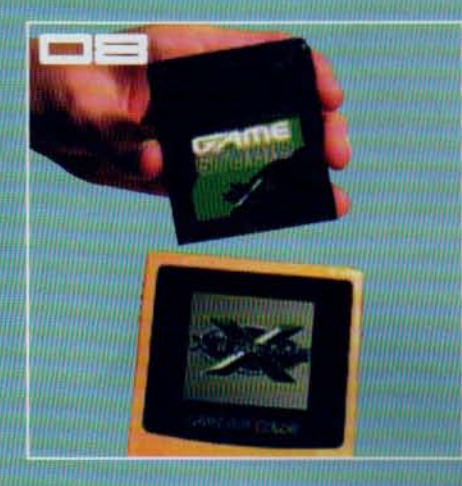




Gundam Vs Zion will not be making it over to the UK, but Bandai's models will placate mecha obsessives



Perhaps worryingly, this screenshot will have a certain demographic salivating with excitement





Edge hopes that British rail companies will look to the sophistication of *Train Simulator* for inspiration





Game Boy games in hi-res and utilising DualShock rumble facility. Is this the future of videogaming?

06 Model mecha

UK: Played out over eight movies and seven TV series, the Gundam saga is the most cherished mecha franchise in Japan. To complement Capcom's new battle game, *Gundam Vs Zion* – due out in Japanese arcades this spring – Bandai is releasing a new range of Gundam model kits. Though Capcom is unlikely to distribute the coin-op outside Japan, the delicate model kits will be coming to these shores. Complete with deathscythes and tridents the elegant Gundam range is priced from £9 to £25, and will be in shops from April.

07 PC trainspotting

US: Given the commercial success of train sims in Japan, it is surprising that no western developer has yet come up with a compelling variant. But hoping to exploit the huge untapped market of European train enthusiasts who are likely to pick up any train paraphernalia that they can get their hands on comes Microsoft's *Train Simulator*, which probably boasts more sophistication than Railtrack's routing software. Developed in the UK by Kuju Entertainment (and first reported on in **E**88), the title is fast approaching completion. Let's just hope that Richard Branson picks up a copy.

08 PS2 goes handheld

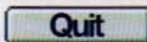
UK: PlayStation2 owners will be delighted to hear that AAA titles are now available for their console, albeit in the form of *Pokémon* and *The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening*. Game Studio's Game Boy Color emulation system will enable any GBC game to run on Sony's 128bit console via the specially adapted GamePort device. Though unlikely to set the videogame world alight, the opportunity to see 8bit games enhanced through bilinear filtering may be a curiosity too good to miss. The system will retail for £40, and comes with eight inbuilt games.

Continue

Game Boy Advance
So small, but so loveable

Joystick Junkies
A night of free beer and vintage slots? Go on, then

www.c64audio.com
One visit equals: how to annoy colleagues who just don't get it



AISA's console game of the year award
SSX better than *Majora's Mask*? Yes, and pigs fly

Net talk of *Amped*'s mocked-up screenshots
From all the fuss you'd think J Allard had shot JFK

FourFourTwo*'s 2/5 review of *ISS Pro Evolution 2
And you wonder why the *FIFA* series sells so well



09 The Hacker Ethic

Up to 12 months ago, the hacker was the defining creative figure of the Internet age. Characterised either as a beardy geek or teenage supernerd, he (and it always was a he) was that most envied of creatures. Not only could he lie in until the afternoon, but the ability to mess around with lines of computer code made him a millionaire.

The dot bomb has popped the bubble of this popular appeal, but for Pikka Himanen the hacker remains a visionary. Genial, creative and sociable, he is driven by intellectual curiosity. In contrast, the cracker is his antithesis, out only to harm. And this is a good example of the naivety of Himanen's thesis.

For most people the hacker and the cracker are one and the same, but for Himanen they are poles apart. Which is not to say this book is ill conceived, only that it has an overly grandiose aim: an attempt to formulate a new blueprint for society.

'The Hacker Ethic' is a hymn to a different way of life. More than just fiddling around with computers, the noble art of hacking is explained as a road of emancipation from the drudgery of the drone worker. It's certainly heady stuff, but the main criticism that can be levelled against its conclusions are the same as those which hang over the open-source movement – which is the fullest expression of the hacking ethic. Is it more than a lifestyle choice for a tiny number of highly educated people operating within the developed world? Or put it another way, what are you more comfortable with – *Windows* and XBox, or Linux and Indrema?

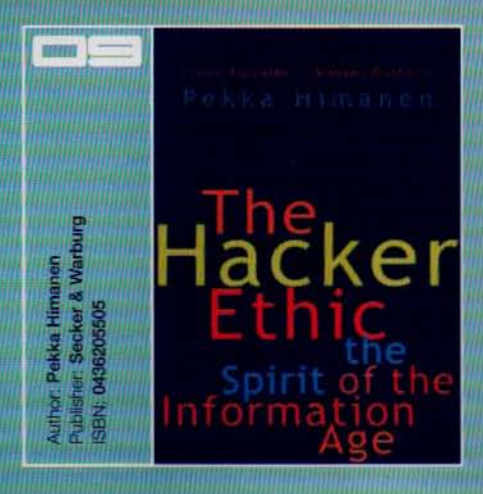
10 number9dream

While the dividing line between games and movies continues to narrow, the novel has proved to be less susceptible to the opportunities offered by the new world order of electronic entertainment. There may be plenty of books which flag their coolness with videogame references, but there are far fewer examples of fiction that use videogames' experimental existentialism (that is the fantasy of playing at being someone else) to any great effect.

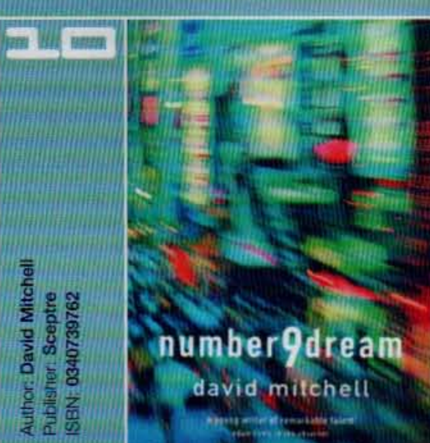
To some degree, David Mitchell's 'number9dream' is a novel about gaming – one chapter is entitled Video Games. But it is its use of fantastical sequences combined with the backdrop of Tokyo's Shibuya district that gets it closer than most wannabes to the heart of what the gaming experience is all about.

Even the basic plot is straight out of Japanese game design. Abandoned by both parents and scarred by the death of his twin sister, Eiji Miyake comes to Tokyo to discover the identity of his father. Twisting in and out of daydreams and nightmares, he makes his way through the fallout of the failing Japanese economy and entanglement with the brutal gang wars of the Yakuza. Along the way, he slips in and out of love and smokes a lot of cigarettes. And although as the story unwinds it becomes more about impressions than emotions, 'number9dream' remains an engaging read.

Indeed, perhaps the best compliment that can be paid is the extent to which it is reminiscent of playing *Shenmue*, itself a story about a young man searching for identity and closure.



Author: **Pekka Himanen**
Publisher: **Secker & Warburg**
ISBN: **0436205505**



Author: **David Mitchell**
Publisher: **Sceptre**
ISBN: **0340739762**



Site: **Magnetic Scrolls Gallery**
URL: **www.webpan.com/dsinclair/ms/mscrolls.html**

11 Web site of the month

Text adventuring at the dawn of gaming could be a fraught affair. While goblins and bugbears were a hazard best avoided, a poor text parsing system could prove even more perilous. In 1985 the release of *Jinxter* changed all that. With a sophisticated parsing command system and stylised graphics, the game went on to establish its developer, Magnetic Scrolls, as one of the most important softcos in Britain. Founded in 1983 by Anita Sinclair and Ken Gordon, the company folded in 1992 after only releasing seven titles. The Magnetic Scroll Gallery tells the company's story and provides nostalgic adventurers with the chance to view all the art, maps, and walkthroughs from the games.







12 Advertainment

Japan: The game that kept Shigeru Miyamoto occupied when **Edge** last interviewed him during Spaceworld survives the development process to make an appearance on Japanese TV.

01-02 Game Boy Color logo; classic *Zelda* theme plays in background.; Link appears on horseback 03 Voiceover: *"The Legend of Zelda Fushiginokinobi Daichinosho"* 04-08 "The seasons have become strange" 09-13 "Control the four seasons and explore the world" 14 *"The Legend of Zelda Fushiginokinobi Daichinosho"* 15 "Coming in two versions!" 16 "The new legend starts here"

Gaze locked on the cathode ray, hands fixed to the cabinet, RedEye is at war with *Space Invaders*. This is Joystick Junkies, an industry party for anyone in the industry prepared to trek to the Hoxton Square venue and press the flesh with ligging journos and drunken WAP evangelists. The yin to the loathsome human yang? Around 30 free-play classic retro machines. So that's why the place is packed: everyone wants to be Matthew Broderick circa 'Wargames', thrashing the hell out of *Galaga* before rushing off to save the world and get the girl. It's geek pornography, and people are living their fantasies to the fullest in the name of lifestyle gaming Web site joystickjunkies.com. More importantly, the beer's free – and so's *OutRun*.

So RedEye stands there, eyes stone-fixed on the advancing waves, utterly confident, absolutely indestructible. Twitch gaming is his forte, and even the grudgingly polite jostling for machines can't stop him now, though the bar's really far too busy for pure gaming comfort. But all the would-be code rage gets lost, rendered pointless in a nu-media fog of cheap Australian beer, post-ironic retrogaming, and vapid sexual disappointment. After all, this is a party for the gaming industry, which means the male-female ratio is hardly weighted in the favour of those who'd hoped to pick up the arcade girl of their dreams. RedEye might be Matthew Broderick, but where's his Ally Sheedy?

She's behind you, watching. Out of nowhere, RedEye feels her gaze on the back of his neck. It's a sixth sense, or a seventh, if you also count the one that's instinctively keeping him away from the invaders' constantly dripping fire. Maybe the two senses are interfering, because the instant distraction of female attention is enough to make him miss a single bullet that slices through a gap in the third base, and misses his ship by a pixel. Too close. It's down to RedEye's gaming buddy, patiently waiting his turn, to forge a smooth introduction. He thinks. He pauses. His eyes light up, and he turns to her. "We're employing the Nagoya method," he says brightly, referencing the Japanese space-fighting technique where the middle invaders are eliminated first. The girl smiles, shakes her head, and walks away. Game over.

Painful, though hardly surprising. The Nagoya line's a risky one anywhere, and here there are guys queuing up for a chance to impress, so much so that RedEye finds it easier to get a go on the gorgeous tabletop *1942* machine than he does to get a moment alone with a female industry friend. But things are about to change. A social dynamic can be as clear as this, and everyone can know their role – David Lightman or Jennifer – but it doesn't take much to alter everything. Ladies and gentlemen, fate is fickle: Bits have arrived.

It starts as a ripple of whispered gossip heading through the bar, and quickly turns to fact as... wham! There's Emily... and wham! There's Bouff... And double wham! There's Aleks! And all of a sudden the pick-and-choose partygirls are usurped, because if there's one thing that's going to attract the attention of Johnny Industry more than Girls Who Accept Videogames, it's Girls Who Play Videogames On TV. Joystick Junkies turns into a Bits/*Pokémon* theme night, with one thought on all the gents' minds: Gotta Catch 'Em All.

Except for RedEye, naturally. He's no fame junkie, and besides, the *Arkanoid* tabletop's free at last, so it's time to sit down, press start, and ponder the threesome's attraction. Their late-night vehicle's easy enough to deconstruct and destroy, but really, why bother? For all its faults – infrequent bouts of risible scripting and the occasional factual inaccuracy – it's doing more to push gaming forward than anything else on TV. Yes, it's tacky, and shallow, perhaps, but it's got style and enthusiasm, and sometimes that's enough. Above all, it's never ashamed: not of the industry, not of the games, not of the players. The girls won't laugh at you for talking about videogames. They'll laugh at you for being rubbish at *Q*Bert*, which, in a business eager to dismiss itself as kid fodder, is a far more palatable type of humiliation.

So the boys gather and stare, and the girls scowl and bitch, and the Bits crew pretend not to notice they're the centre of attention. Which is a pretty impressive feat, given the size of the gawping crowd that's starting to gather around *Dangerous Curves*, where Emily and Bouff are riding their way into the sections of onlookers' minds marked 'wishful thinking'. Meanwhile, Aleks slips away and skips over to the vacant *Pole Position* machine, and as her eyes focus and she blocks out the leches from her peripheral vision, RedEye idly wonders if the lead role in 'D.A.R.Y.L. 2' has been cast. No, maybe not. She's good. She's not that good.

Then RedEye spies the girl who'd approached earlier having her space invaded by a middle-aged heavy-eyed developer high on mobile dreams and chemical confidence. He's trying to sell her his idea of a WAP *Marble Madness*.

"It'll be just like the original *Marble Madness* – like, really retro, you know, a classic? Only we're doing it as a text adventure. So it'll tell you you're on a flat plain with a slope going south, and so you type go south, and it tells you you're rolling. But then you have to type go north 'cause the momentum's, like, taking you too fast. And then there's the enemies... we're gonna have some really cool two-tone effects. Like, animated. And if you get a hi-score it'll go on the Internet. And you can message it to your friends. Viral marketing. Marble marketing. Ahahahaah. Ha. Huuuuuuuh."

She nods, listlessly, her eyes scanning for the geek-chic Nagoya-boy, who suddenly seems like a much more attractive proposition. But it's too late. He's broken, inconsolable. "I just thought she might be interested," says RedEye's pal. "I thought it was a winning line." No, my friend, it wasn't: not now, not ever. Watch 'Wargames'. The only way to win is not to play.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*



REDEYE

Commentary from inside the videogame industry

Girls and gaming: an enigma pondered

"We're employing the Nagoya method," he says brightly, referencing the technique where the middle invaders are eliminated first

In the future, everybody will be members of improvisational amateur dramatic societies. They'll meet at the local church hall and script their own theatrical narratives off the cuff. No one will actually bother to watch television soaps or films any more. Why accept the linear creation of some arrogant author playing god when we can make it up ourselves?

Bilge, obviously. Yet that's what many people are saying about videogames. Online gaming, especially in the shape of MMORPGs, is now hailed in many quarters as the inevitable ruling paradigm of the future. But the assumption that it will make singleplayer gaming obsolete doesn't stand up to much scrutiny. Historically, networking an activity has never rendered the previous, unnetworked form of that activity redundant. Networked voice communication, in the form of the telephone, did not stop people enjoying monolithically authored, one-way mass communication such as novels or newspapers. Conference calling, meanwhile, has not replaced face-to-face meetings in the business world. Networking increases some opportunities (convenience of communication at a distance), while necessarily compromising others (in the telephone example, subtlety of face-to-face communication). A similar trade-off of different benefits and defecits operates with videogames, too.

The psychological distinction boils down to who you think your opponent is. Sega's wonderful *Phantasy Star Online* induces a marvellous feeling of transgeographical, multilingual solidarity, because you know the other characters onscreen are controlled by real human consciousnesses half a world away. Team strategies can be refined, and players can congratulate each other on vanquishing the Nano Dragon. In essence, co-operative MMORPGs such as this are rather like playing football, with humans versus enemy AI.

Combative online games such as *Counterstrike*, on the other hand, can be compared to football with two fully human sides. They offer the distinct pleasure of knowing that you have triumphed against the organic skills of another human being, rather than a bot with artificially stupid aiming. Like an epically contextualised *Quake III*, a game such as *World War II Online* promises to integrate air, ground, and sea combat into a huge, evolving counterfactual military scenario. On a previously unimagined scale, it seeks to combine human-on-human bloodlust with the sort of team spirit exemplified by *PSO*. Games hovering between these two extremes, meanwhile – the *EverQuests* and *Ultima Onlines* – are still essentially predicated on a sort of team effort of imagination. They furnish a space wherein the players enact a consensual mass hallucination.

So far, so good. But it might be that MMORPGs are over-hyped precisely because of the work they cut out of the developer's schedule. Creating an environment and rules for an MMORPG is in no way a simple or uncreative exercise, but it does free the developer from having to make many difficult scripting and character interaction decisions.

The gameplay mechanics of *PSO* are simple: run around with your new intercontinental friends and shoot or slash the monsters. It's a bland oneplayer game. On the other hand, *Zelda 64* is a gorgeous singleplayer experience because of the player's sense of immersion in a dramatically scripted world. How could you turn it into an online, multiplayer experience? You could retain computer control of the NPCs and allow many human-controlled Links to be following their quests simultaneously; but then you run into problems of environmental consistency – for example, the sky should be scorched and thundery for player A, but bright and sunny for player B. The other way you could do it would be to assign every player in the online world a specific role. But who would be satisfied with being assigned the role of a Kokiri elf who only enjoys a tiny walk-on part? Wouldn't everyone want to be Link or Gandondorf?

This is not the place to get into the brain-achingly complex arguments about the artistic status of 'interactive storytelling'. Suffice it to say that while some videogames are like team sports, others are more like stories in their linear progression through dramatic stages. The team-sport games work well as multiplayer networked experiences; the storylike games don't. Notice that, after the multiplayer obsession of the last batch of *Quakes*, *Unreals* and *Half-Life* mods, John Carmack intends the new *Doom* game to be above all a thrilling, involving singleplayer experience.

The most aggressive proponents of MMORPGs offer as proof that singleplayer is outmoded the idea that a solo videogamer is 'just playing against the computer'. There are two good replies to this. One would be that the sensation of interacting with something that you know is not human or animal, but somehow exhibits intelligent behaviour, is a wonder of the modern world that we should be terrifically excited and grateful to experience. *Black & White* is the summit to date of this extraordinary new art, and it also has a very logical demarcation of solo versus networked features. Clearly the game would not be nearly as fascinating if we knew that the creatures and villagers were controlled by other humans; on the other hand, the prospect of our unique creatures meeting others in the online world is deliciously intriguing.

In another context we might reply to the charge of 'just playing against the computer' as follows. Hardware is a screen, not an agent. The computer or the console is not an actor, but a medium through which the player tests their skills and imagination against the wily creativity of the game designer. Hideo Kojima, Shigeru Miyamoto, or Warren Spector can offer us an artistically coherent universe to explore, and one in which a controlling intelligence has worked hard to make the solo player's dramatic experience consistently satisfying. There are no such guarantees in multiplayer worlds. Democracy can easily degenerate into a meaningless rabble. In the field of electronic entertainment, we will always love dictators.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Videogame politics: why democracy will never prevail

Historically, networking an activity has never rendered the previous, unnetworked form of that activity redundant

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Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

Towards the end of last year, the American TV series 'Friends' started to be popular in Japan, thanks to its release on DVD. In the US, the series has reached its sixth season, but in Japan we are only on the second (Monica and Chandler are not yet in love).

When an American series comes to Japan, its popularity in the US is often used as promotion. As a result of this many Japanese people are willing to give it a try. Moreover, in Japan, imported series are totally localised. This obviously means that the level of the translation and the quality of the voice actors cast are enormously important if the series is to be a success. This has been done well for 'Friends', and so I thoroughly enjoy watching the series (however, I'm intrigued by the fact that Rachel from 'Friends' and Donna from 'Beverly Hills 90210' have the same voices in Japan).

Anyway, when making a series like 'Friends', two versions of a scene are often formulated. These are then tested with the public who came to the studio, and only one will be broadcast. If the public reaction is bad, the scriptwriters will make changes in realtime. When I heard this for the first time about 'Friends', it reminded me of an adventure game or RPG with a multiple story/ending format. In a multiple story game, the player will make his choice and the story will take a different course. In the case of 'Friends', the show which is broadcast is determined by the level of laughs of the public present in the studio, so the course of the series may change. If you look at it this way, although the TV audience sees only one version, making the series is actually very similar to a gameplay experience – the people who watch the TV show experience only one version of the show, but the public in the studio experience a true multi-story process. The live audience uses a controller called 'laughter' to push actors to be funnier, thereby heightening the entertainment value. So, this live feel is very important to this particular gameplay-style experience.

Advances in CG made it possible to give to home gaming entertainment a similar level of experience to the movies. But what the development team has to take in to account is that too much effort can be poured into making scenes over which people have no control. It is important not to put together a title which can only be appreciated for the beauty of its FMV. The story or the level of in-game graphics have to be equal or superior, as if not the player will get bored. When a company puts too much stress on FMV, it often results in poor gameplay or content, and so users may deem the game boring or restrictive. This is the sort of company that should make movies instead of games. However, on the flipside of this the goal for many home videogame developers is to offer an extended play time, which is often generated by adding movies to artificially extend the game's life.

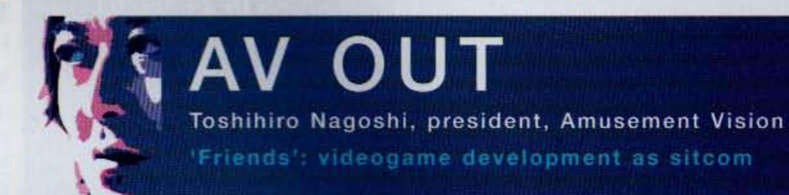
The situation in the arcades is completely different. Here, developers must focus on income, so the play time has to be as short as possible. The CG movies have no link to the games themselves, so as the deadline approaches FMV is the first thing to go. FMV sequences are often only used to give the player a rest – they are designed not to interfere with the game, and so are not essential. For example, in a spy gun shooting game, during the time the players are moving their characters on screen, a scene will appear displaying the pair communicating by radio.

When a game is fun, the player should be immersed. If a CG movie crops up and shatters this, it would be terrible for the title. The player would lose the link with the action and be brought back to the real world. In the case of an action game, the player should associate completely with the character. This is very similar to the live experience the public in the studio feel for 'Friends'. However, to be totally free is not always fun.

In 'Friends', the equivalent of total freedom would be an actor who refused to follow the script. The whole show would be ruined. A scenario structure is necessary to guide the actors. In the case of a game, the player should move inside an environment that has been ordered by the developer. According the level of player's skill, the game will take a given course and will reveal more of its secrets, involving the player still further. In order to achieve this, the developer must first settle on an appealing character. Then, a very involving scenario and stage have to be built. Using these elements, developers have to generate a situation whereby the player can freely enjoy the environment. If not, the game may look boring, or the player could feel frustrated. If not enough attention is paid to these points, frustration may accumulate and then the player – the star – could decide to quit the show. Game over.

I really find 'Friends' a very similar case to game development. I hope CG movies don't rise in prominence in games, and that we will develop more games in which the player plays this central role. I have to return watching the TV show now – today's episode is the one starring Julia Roberts.





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

'Friends': videogame development as sitcom

When a game is fun, the player should be immersed. If a CG movie crops up and shatters this, it would be terrible for the title

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Edge's most wanted

Silent Hill 2
Edge's game of TGS was playable for the first time and delivered a suitably creepy experience. DualShock rumblings have never been quite so unnerving.



(PS2) Konami

Phantasy Star Online 2
Two more areas, more secret items, mags based on Sega's console line-up, cheat prevention, and another 100 levels for your character to evolve. Fabulous.



(TBC) Sega

Shenmue 2
Ryo's epic quest continues in Hong Kong and promises arm-wrestling, mini Pachinko games and pawn shops to trade your chapter one collectibles.



(TBC) Sega

Final Fight
Haggar, Guy, and Cody return on GBA to eliminate the Mad Gear gang from Metro City. It should herald a glorious return for the 2D scrolling beat 'em up.



(GBA) Capcom

You feeling lucky?

Defending (some) gore games

A polygonal fist flails haphazardly across the screen searching for a head to pummel. It's another firstperson-perspective game and the usual comedic chase sequence must ensue before a weapon is acquired. Eventually, the fist manages to find a face and a street thug lies bleeding in the gutter. Predictably, the shotgun which he leaves behind invests the player with an even greater sense of power. But is this feeling one of blood lust?

Arguably, this is more a question of cause and effect than primal rage. A game's sensitivity to a player's input is absolutely key to providing an enriching game experience. This holds true for a platformer as well as the most violent FPS. And – admit it – a greater feeling of gratification is experienced when a weapon's effect produces a reaction commensurate with its perceived potency. The death animations in *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* (below) are not remembered for their gory nature, but because the player really felt as if his or her actions and accuracy were having a profound effect on the gameworld.

This is no adolescent fixation with gore for its own sake. *TimeSplitters* is a quality game, but its sanitisation of death is a weakness. Shooting opponents with double Uzis has much the same effect as a shotgun or, for that matter, a raygun. While it is true that some weapons in the game cause more damage, the fact that you can't actually see the damage being inflicted reduces much of the impact. As if to champion this argument, *Operation Flashpoint* stormed into the office this month and instantly impressed with its insistence on realism and accuracy. A shot to the head from a hidden assailant soon makes the player adopt more thoughtful strategies. Indeed, the implementation of one-shot kills has become one of the most essential ingredients for the FPS. The head may be the most vital area of an enemy, but it also provides a relatively small target. If balanced well this provokes the player into making crucial decisions. Do you go for the risky head shot from a distance or go up close and take the enemy out with a spray of machine-gun fire?

Sometimes the depiction of violence in videogames can cloak the underlying beauty of the game mechanics. The finest games in all genres always ask the player to balance risk against reward. In short, do you feel lucky?











Halo

Bungie Software's alien space war title promises to prove XBox's console qualifications, qualming any fears about the console's controller at the same time







As you would expect from a title developed for the custom graphics chip beating at the heart of the XBox, the attention to visual detail is staggering



Having started life as a firstperson shooter with massively multiplayer aspirations destined for the PC and Mac, *Halo* is grist to the mill for critics who still perceive Microsoft's console as little more than a PC-lite in a console-shaped box. If the playable demo shown off at Gamestock is anything to go by, though, the transition to XBox and console-style playability is one that Bungie has been taking seriously since it was acquired by the Seattle-based giant, making excellent progress.

The demo also puts to rest any doubts about the XBox controller, with Bungie capitalising on its design to create a gameplay style that seems less inspired by the shoot-and-strafe dynamic that characterises the most popular PC shooters, and more akin to the tactically satisfying style of *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*.

For those who are familiar with the title (first seen in **E**77), its ring-shaped alien habitat remains intact, providing an opportunity to showcase the dazzling graphical abilities of the XBox. Outdoor locations boast an imposing horizon in each direction, with the arc of the planet receding upwards in the far distance covered by streaks of cloud cover. The interior areas on display don't disappoint either, with the locations in the demo boasting an architecture that heightens tension and adds verve to shootouts.

Also still in place is the alien nemesis, the Covenant, which adds colour in the shape of enemy technology that can be appropriated. Bungie is promising flying vessels and hovercraft of alien origin to complement the manmade buggies and tanks, while the game's arsenal will apparently vary from semi-automatic pistols, rocket launchers, and flamethrowers to Covenant plasma swords. As well as the obvious ingame implications of this selection, the developer also hopes to capitalise by including missions that require the player to plunder alien devices to supplement missions which are more straightforward, such as attacking alien outposts or rescuing fallen companions.

While on paper *Halo* may appear to be just another standard shooter, the level that was playable at Gamestock suggests that if the finished game can implement a structure that does justice to gameplay, Microsoft will have a hit on its hands. Allowing the player access to just one of the vehicles that will appear in the final version, and just a single weapon, the demo nevertheless pointed to enormous

The *Halo* level that was playable at Gamestock suggests that if the finished structure can do justice to the gameplay, it will be a huge hit

Format: **XBox**
Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **Bungie Software**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4 (US) TBC (UK)**









Exterior locations reveal the breathtaking distant arc of the alien homeworld (left), while interior environments make excellent use of architectural space to create areas that increase tension and add drama to gunplay

potential. Jumping into a buggy with an AI-controlled tailgunner, vehicle control initially seemed idiosyncratic, but intuitive nevertheless. After an initial beachfront assault it was time to dump the Jeep and enter an alien base on foot. The machine gun at the player's disposal has to rank as one of the more solid and memorable weapons in the annals of firstperson shooters; satisfyingly sturdy, with a weapon-mounted ammo display and clunky action, and requiring a lengthy reload action at the most panic-inducing moments. It could even be used to good effect to rifle butt chitinous opponents. More importantly, throughout the demo, the sense of control promises a finely honed balance in the final version.

The one element of the game that wasn't shown at Gamestock, however, was the multiplayer mode – either splitscreen or networked. Bungie is promising to deliver various modes to augment the oneplayer game, including co-operative teamplay, splitscreen deathmatch, and a co-operative run through singleplayer missions à la *Perfect Dark*. But in light of the fact that Microsoft has yet to release information about its broadband or connectivity strategy, the developer was not allowed to discuss multiplayer any further than this. It would be a shame if the lofty ambition of a significant networked component had to be thrown out for the game to arrive as a launch title for XBox, but judging from the elements that are already in place, *Halo* is an immensely promising console title even without a multiplayer mode.

If the broadband connectivity of the XBox is utilised with any degree of success, and if the level design is anywhere near as accomplished as the gameplay, it is certain that *Halo* will be the killer app in Microsoft's portfolio when the console launches.



Judging by the Gamestock demo, the ecological hierarchy of the Covenant provides a satisfying challenge, with small aliens providing cannon fodder while their larger brethren amount to more substantial opposition

Keeping control

One of the most encouraging things about the Gamestock demo of *Halo* is the simplicity and effectiveness of its control system. Like pretty much every other console shooter, *Halo* transfers the traditional keyboard functions of PC shooters to the left analogue stick, while the role of the mouse is given over to the right analogue stick. Unlike other console shooters, the controller seems almost perfectly adjusted for the game, with both sticks providing ample give, and the software seems to have been coded to achieve a finely honed balance between input and gameplay.

Amped: Freestyle Snowboarding

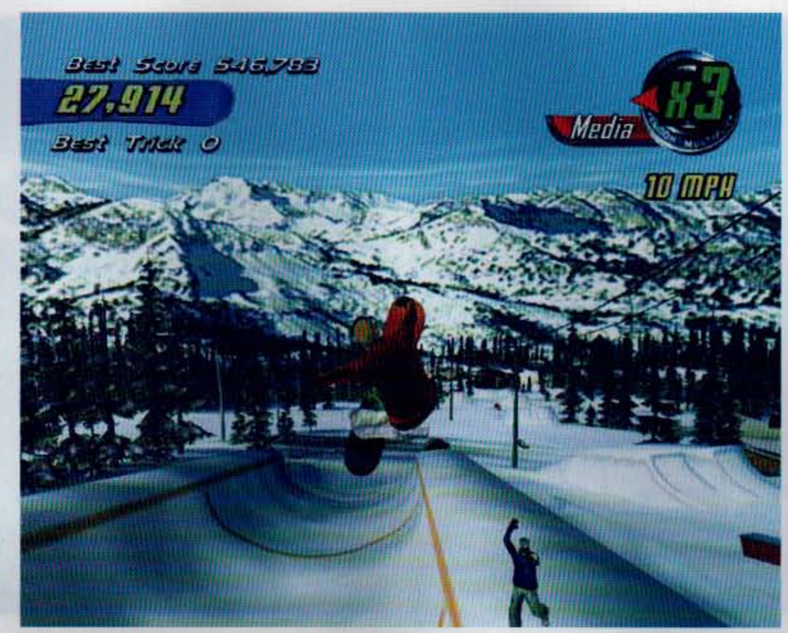
Format: **XBox**
Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4 (US) TBC (UK)**

Microsoft makes overtures towards the 'hardcore boarding community' with this trick-heavy title set on the slopes of three top Stateside mountain resorts



Rockin' tunes, dude

In keeping with the 'crazy ass' culture of the hardcore snowboarding community at which the game is aimed, Microsoft currently has plans to allow players to load their own favourite tunes on to the hard drive to accompany their jibs and bonks. While this has enormous potential for other genres – Bizarre Creations is also considering incorporating such a feature in *Project Gotham* – in the light of rulings against the likes of Napster, there may be legal issues to consider before such an innovation can be guaranteed to appear.









Microsoft is still to incorporate the motion-captured animations and the final level of detail that will feature in the finished game, but even at this stage the title looks impressive. More importantly, it feels right in terms of board handling and physics, and the developer is working hard to create an authentic experience for the hardcore boarding community





Dispensing with the competitive race action that is a staple of the snowboarding genre, *Amped* places an almost ostentatious emphasis on freestyle snowboarding. While this means that it isn't quite comparable with the excellent *SSX*, in terms of playability it looks every bit as good, even at this early stage. Placeholder graphics and animations will have to suffice for now, but work is currently proceeding apace on the comprehensive motion-capture sequences that will be used in the finished version.

The game is set to feature the entirety of three real-life mountain resorts – Brighton in Utah, Stratton in Vermont, and California's Snow Summit. Each one will be mapped right down to the last detail and feature all sorts of jumps and rails, and there will also be the option to unlock venues designed for the game by Chris Gunnerson ('world-renowned terrain architect', according to Microsoft). Judging by the mountainside – itself not quite complete – on display at Gamestock, this game is perhaps the best indication at this stage of the graphical potential of XBox's custom graphics chip.

In place of the racing dynamic featured in most other snowboarding games, the emphasis is firmly on *Tony Hawk's*-style trick combo gameplay – apparently in a bid to win over the hardcore snowboarding community, which hasn't been too enamoured with the current crop of 'boarding games. But if the sandbox play offered by the freedom of entire resorts doesn't appeal, the game will also boast a Career mode, requiring the player to impress wandering sponsors, spectators, and the odd camera crew with their crazy-ass stunts. On top of this, each of the 120 runs included in the game will boast six challenges, including pro challenges, where a more experienced snowboarder has to be beaten at their own game.

As with the majority of the games on display at Microsoft's HQ, *Amped* keeps controls simple, making the best use of the XBox controller, but equally significantly the physics that are in the game at the moment are simply sublime, and benefit hugely from the intuitive controls. Hopefully this is an indication that the finished product should precipitate the sort of deep play that a sandbox-style structure makes necessary. If not, the addition of multiplayer competitions should add a substantial degree of longevity. Indeed, the ability to throw snowballs at fellow competitors should undoubtedly add to the competitive tension.

Le Mans 24 Hours

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Infogrames Melbourne House**
Developer: **Melbourne House**
Origin: **Australia**
Release: **Q2**

Melbourne House brings the world's most famous endurance race to PlayStation2, but the title looks unlikely to be significantly different to its Dreamcast incarnation

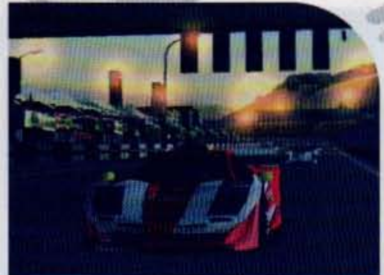
Remember *Le Mans 24 Hours* on the Dreamcast? Probably not. Which is a pity, as its impressive draw distance, competitive spirit, and visual charms rivalled the likes of *Ferrari F355*, which received many more plaudits. Unfortunately, *Le Mans 24 Hours* for PS2 looks unlikely to offer any marked differences. While some minor adjustments and tweaks have been made, owners of the original will find little to tempt them over to the latest iteration on Sony's hardware.

Although Melbourne House has addressed some of the grumbles targeted at its original simulation, these improvements amount to little more than a few go-faster stripes to the paintwork. Animated pit crews will now be included, and while they may only serve as visual garnish, the improvement to the game's atmosphere will be welcomed. A rear-view mirror has also been implemented to make blocking manoeuvres more intuitive under braking. A full 30 new car models, including prototypes and GTs, have also been added, bringing the total up to 70. There will also be an extra circuit (Road Atlanta) for the Full Season mode. Improvements to the engine notes and further unlockable features complete a respectable package.

However, those who have sampled the delights of the Dreamcast version will instantly note the lack of a fourplayer split-screen option and some reduction in texture detail. Although a twoplayer option remains and the frame rate is more than sprightly, it is difficult to set aside the feeling that the PS2's VRAM limitations are still troubling developers. Typically, the lack of damage and mechanical failures due to licensing sensitivities further detracts from the overall experience.









Hopefully the dynamic lighting effects evident in the night sections on DC will be as moody on PS2

On a more positive note, the wealth of game modes, including Quick Race, Championship, and Time Trial, will serve to entice those of a more casual disposition as well as the more hardcore enthusiast. On full simulation the true obsessive will be able to play through the race in realtime. Driving from dusk until dawn in unpredictable weather conditions should placate even the most indefatigable motor sport fan.

Le Mans 24 Hours still promises to be a solid driving title, and if the delays to *Gran Turismo 3 A-Spec* continue, Infogrames could well find itself with an open track to exploit.



Melbourne House claims that the draw distance will approximate to a 700-metre view of the road ahead. Unfortunately, this will come down to somewhere nearer to 550 metres for the twoplayer splitscreen option. In most other areas the team has improved the title and it will now include animated pit crews and 30 more vehicles

Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis

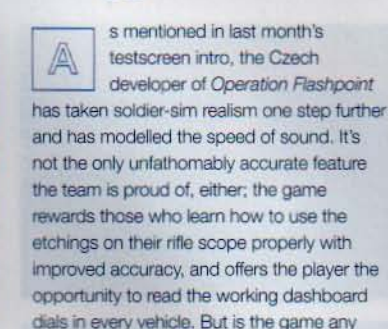
Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **Bohemia Interactive Studio**
Origin: **Czech Republic**
Release: **Q3**

Open ground, open options, open fire – Bohemia Interactive looks like taking the soldier sim to the next level, if only it can introduce solidity to its already convincing gameworld









As mentioned in last month's testscreen intro, the Czech developer of *Operation Flashpoint* has taken soldier-sim realism one step further and has modelled the speed of sound. It's not the only unfathomably accurate feature the team is proud of, either; the game rewards those who learn how to use the etchings on their rifle scope properly with improved accuracy, and offers the player the opportunity to read the working dashboard dials in every vehicle. But is the game any better for all the attention to detail?

At the moment, it looks like it may be. The focused realism provides an internal real-world consistency, and that means that even those not normally drawn to the genre will find *Flashpoint's* world an easy one to enter. It's a big world, too, with three sparsely populated islands to attack and defend, and a 50-mission Campaign mode to string the Cold War-based storyline together.



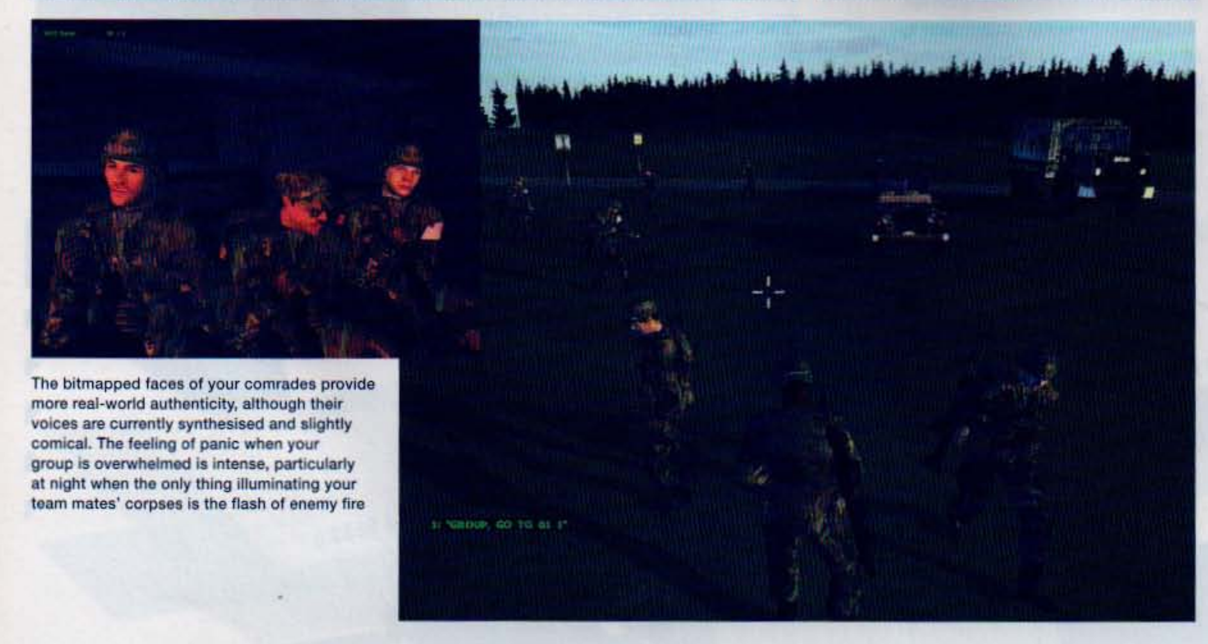


As well as firstperson and thirdperson, *Operation Flashpoint* offers a gunsight perspective

Codemasters is emphasising *Flashpoint's* non-linearity, and it's clear why. The openness of the terrain, the ability to commandeer any working vehicle, and the variety of weaponry at your disposal all contribute to an overwhelming feel of freedom within each mission. Similar in structure to *Deus Ex*, a goal is set and it's up to the player how it's achieved: the art of fighting is expressed as a richer, much less frenetic experience than current soldierboy favourite *Counter-Strike*. Though it carries a similar one-shot-kill dynamic, the emphasis here is on stealth and strategy rather than outright reaction speed. Careful planning is imperative, and when things go wrong, failure to dive for appropriate cover will see an immediate appearance of the unsubtle 'You're dead' screen.

Multiplayer support appears to be another of *Flashpoint's* stronger suits. Theoretically, the number of players in any one game is unlimited, though in practice it's likely to be strictly confined by current hardware technology. No matter, since even with two players the game entertains; co-operative mode is stunning, providing some of the gaming highlights of the year thus far, with players combining to take dual control of tanks (as drivers and gunners), or supporting land assaults with attack helicopters.

The experience is surrounded by an air of fragility, not just because of the instant kills, but also thanks to the current state of the code. Like its Czech countryman *Hidden And Dangerous*, there's the lingering feeling that all that's stopping the whole thing from collapsing into a mess of bugs and texture maps is a lot of developer-instilled belief and a bit of luck. If Bohemia Interactive can ignore the 'ship first, patch later' PC gaming trend and stabilise and polish the title before release, then it has the potential to be a genre-defining work.



The bitmapped faces of your comrades provide more real-world authenticity, although their voices are currently synthesised and slightly comical. The feeling of panic when your group is overwhelmed is intense, particularly at night when the only thing illuminating your team mates' corpses is the flash of enemy fire

Commandos 2





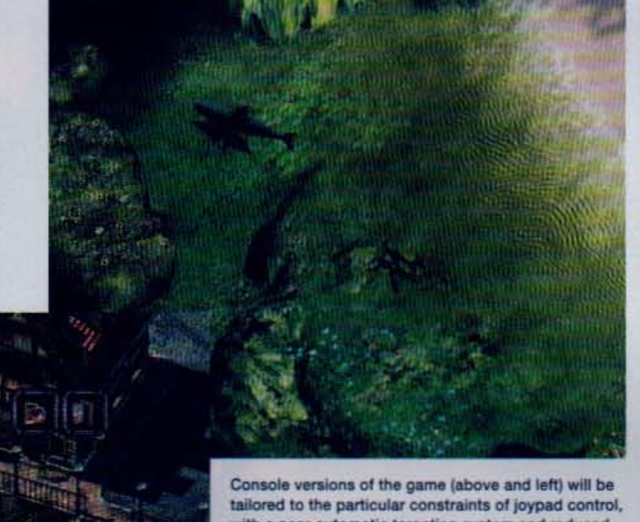
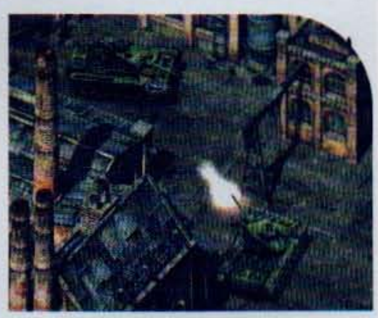
Format: PC, PlayStation2, Dreamcast
Publisher: Eidos Interactive
Developer: Pyro Studios
Origin: Spain
Release: Q2 (PC) Q3 (PS2, DC)

In an not-entirely-unexpected return to the battlefield, Pyro Studios presents the second, significantly updated wave of its hugely successful *Commandos* franchise

Now that the game is apparently 80-per-cent complete, Pyro Studios has revealed a playable demo of the sequel to its massively popular tactical squad-based game, *Commandos*. The demo of the PC version boasts enjoyable – albeit intricate – gameplay, and betrays a glimpse of the combination of historical authenticity and movie-like derring-do that will feature in the finished game, from accurately modelled buildings and vehicles to scenarios inspired by cinema classics such as 'Escape From Colditz' and 'Bridge Over The River Kwai'.

Improvements over the original include more interactive environments, enabling characters to use the cover of shadows, scale walls, peek – and snipe – through windows, as well as the option to check enemy lines of sight and the audible footprint of playable characters. The main innovation according to the developer, though, is the addition of an Easy mode, which should alleviate the problem of the game's notorious difficulty – though still providing a significant challenge.

Console versions of the game will benefit from a considerably reworked interface, which replaces the point-and-click combat dynamic with a targeting system that is balanced for the dynamics of joypad controls.

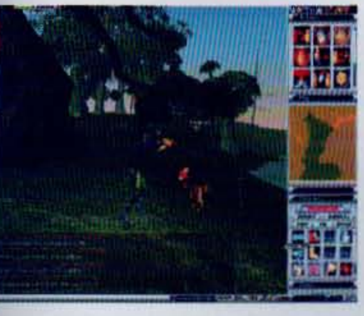



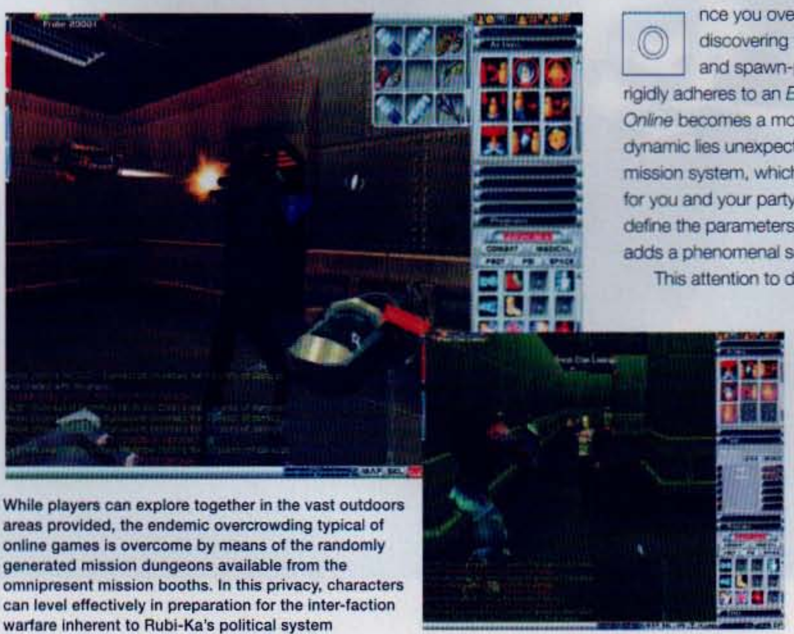

Console versions of the game (above and left) will be tailored to the particular constraints of joypad control, with a near-automatic targeting system and reduced emphasis on directing a whole squad at the same time. The PC version will build upon the intricacy of its predecessor, and, despite the introduction of an Easy mode, promises to present a significant challenge

Anarchy Online

Format: PC
Publisher: Funcom
Developer: In-house
Origin: Norway
Release: TBC

Despite initially seeming to adhere too closely to the *EverQuest* formula, Funcom's massively multiplayer world looks set to adding a new dimension to online gaming

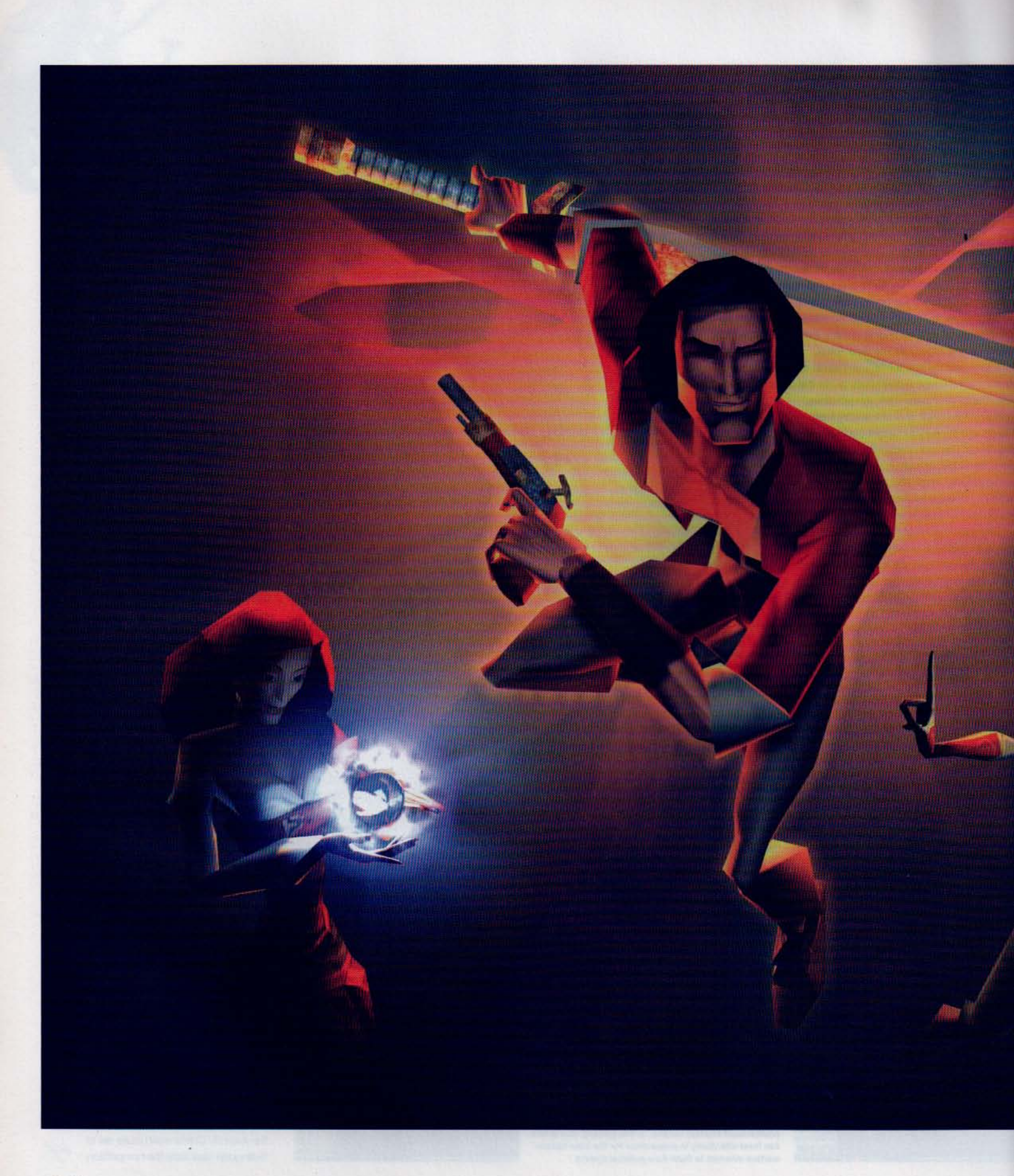




While players can explore together in the vast outdoors areas provided, the endemic overcrowding typical of online games is overcome by means of the randomly generated mission dungeons available from the omnipresent mission booths. In this privacy, characters can level effectively in preparation for the inter-faction warfare inherent to Rubi-Ka's political system

Once you overcome the crushing disappointment on discovering that – with its diet of auto-attacking, pets, groups and spawn-points – Funcom's massively multiplayer online rigidly adheres to an *EverQuest*-inspired model of gameplay, *Anarchy Online* becomes a more reasonable proposition. Underlying the simple dynamic lies unexpected depth, not least in the near-revolutionary mission system, which generates a random and customisable dungeon for you and your party of adventurers on each application. The ability to define the parameters of each encounter, rather than spoiling the action, adds a phenomenal sense of control to each and every situation.

This attention to detail is an oft-repeated theme, and since Funcom has successfully counteracted many of the problems inherent in the current crop of online offerings, you can almost forgive it the derivative implementation. In particular, the pleasantly varied set of skills and avatars promise to introduce a refreshing diversity normally only found in offline RPGs. This brings a welcome variety to the superbly defined visuals, which range from the eye-torturingly bizarre to the photographically breathtaking. With more content to come, the *Anarchy Online* world looks set to distinguish itself from the competition.





Galleon

Bristol-based codeshop Confounding Factor takes to the high seas as Toby Gard looks to repeat the success of Lara Croft with Rhama, the gymnastic, free-climbing pirate at the heart of his latest title

"We wanted to beat what was going on in that game in every conceivable way," begins **Toby Gard** as he sits down to demonstrate *Galleon* to the press, in the shape of **Edge**, for the first time. The comment is accompanied with a mischievous smile and, as you might expect – given that Gard was the animator behind Lara Croft – is directed at *Tomb Raider*. But this is not mere arrogance, as he is about to launch a new character into the digital limelight. While Rhama's (resolutely male) aesthetic charms may not capture the popular imagination in the same way Lara's have, in terms of athleticism Gard's new hero is about to establish a new benchmark.

"What Rhama is doing is so far beyond imagination," continues Gard. "You have to learn to control the analogue stick… well, that's all." Words are not really needed, as moments later he is making his latest creation perform incredibly fluid backflips, leaps, and tumbles around the *Galleon* world. This is all done via a simple joypad interface with his PC, and demonstrates one of *Galleon*'s core principles – accessibility. "Everything is based around fast, exciting, and dangerous," he finishes, almost redundantly given what's happening onscreen.

Rhama's dynamism is absolutely key to Gard's unique approach to gameplay. Pick a spot in one of the environments, and the chances are you can go there. Gard's expertise in animation has resulted in a game which began from first principles. To Gard the movement of a character is not just a way of articulating them





Along with his climbing and acrobatic skills, Rhama can negotiate his way around large underwater sections. Once in full flow, the hero's speed and manoeuvrability is particularly impressive

Format: **TBC**
Publisher: **Interplay**
Developer: **Confounding Factor**
Release: **Q4 2001**
Origin: **UK**

Photography: **Martin Thompson**





To complete many sections of the game the player will be required to scale great heights. Gard will be implementing an auto-save facility to prevent the frustration of having to climb towering rock faces again



Toby Gard
managing director

from one room to another – the animation actually becomes a central gameplay mechanic. "Because of the way this guy moves we've designed the levels from a completely different direction," he elucidates. "Most places you can just reach whichever way you feel like it and do anything you fancy. That opens it up to doing things the way you want to do it rather than the way that the level designer has decided. Then we narrow it down, so we might give the player a section where it is difficult to get through a particular bit. We've thought about it from the opposite direction."

To clarify, Gard takes **Edge** on a journey through *Galleon*'s third level: Slave Island. At one point Rhama is guided into a trap and plunges into an enormous cavern with his fall only broken by a small stretch of water beneath. "The actual way the environment looks is totally about the gameplay," continues Gard, as he directs Rhama towards the cavern wall. The climb looks impossibly steep and treacherous, with no tell-tale polygonal ledges for purchase or a standard series of hand-holds for the player to latch on to, but Rhama begins his ascent with gusto. "He's rather good at all sorts," adds Gard with fatherly pride as Rhama moves swiftly upwards until he reaches a rock edifice at 45° to the floor. But this proves little trouble either, as Rhama's motion alters and he shins slowly outwards towards the cavern roof. Once there an adjustment on the analogue stick sends Gard's hero swinging hand-over-hand.



Heroic developments

Rhama's heroics will become more dramatic as the game progresses. His agility stretches to climbing most surfaces, and at key points in the game he can even clamber over huge creatures to discover their weak points before delivering the killing blow. The pit-monster (below) is Gard's tribute to the Rancor Beast in 'Star Wars', and is just one of the foes to be encountered on Slave Island. Later in the game even more gargantuan monsters surface to help showcase Rhama's skills.

Edge saw some of Rhama's monster climbing skills in action, and although some collision problems remain, the opportunity to clamber over foes provides many gameplay possibilities. Reaching otherwise-inaccessible areas via a piggyback could be just one of the uses of such a device

Environmental awareness

It is an impressive synergy between environment and character. Textures and the subtle variations in the scenery act as visual cues for the player and have a massive impact on how Rhama interacts with his world.

"We have integrated his movement with our physics system," explains **Chris Tector**, Confounding Factor's lead programmer. "So he has full friction across all the different surfaces. You have to watch your environment and try and work your way around and try to deal with it. That even includes subtle things like moss, which blends in. The friction is continually changing, and so when the footsteps are loose you can hear the sound of the moss and you can tell you're getting into a slippery situation. The actual way the environment looks is totally about the gameplay. It's not just a pleasant visual effect."

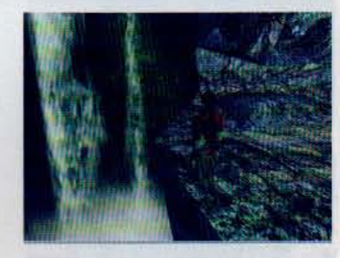
"Most games have a simplified texture environment," adds Gard. "They are happy having a flat floor system, and if there is a horribly scary object, like a barrel, they don't want you colliding with it so they just put a big square box around it. We have gone in the opposite direction and Rhama collides 100 per cent with everything he sees. He is clambering all over it – it's the real thing."

Rhama's athleticism had the potential to cause many design headaches, but Confounding Factor



Although Rhama can fall huge distances and still survive, he is far from invulnerable. *Galleon*'s main appeal is having fun with the character's skills and taking heroic risks

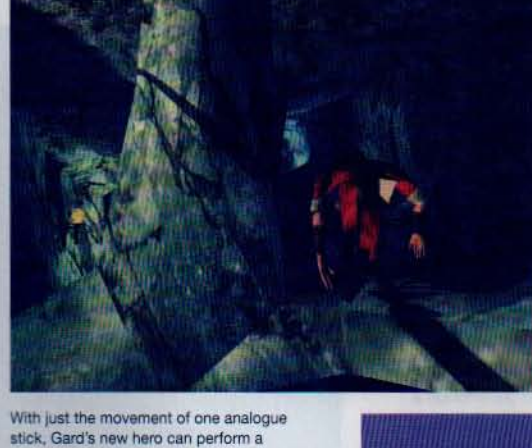






Misting effects from waterfalls, and the level of detail in all textures, are impressive. Although the team expects some minor loss of detail for the PlayStation2 version it will not suffer in terms of functionality





With just the movement of one analogue stick, Gard's new hero can perform a bewildering number of actions. Accessibility and immediacy have been a priority





put together a strict design blueprint and stuck to it. "Everything has been designed for a long time," states Gard. "The script for the game was written around the puzzles, and the whole story is integrated with the gameplay. You can't have one without the other, and to keep gameplay interesting levels are very different in their layout designs. Some levels are very combat oriented, others have none. There are even levels with subgames."

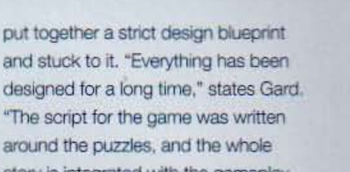
In terms of structure, *Galleon* will be set across six islands, and as Captain Rhama Sabrier – legendary mariner, warrior and cartographer – the player will encounter a series of perilous situations which will draw on all the hero's flamboyant skills. While Confounding Factor is reluctant to reveal plot details, it is safe to disclose that Rhama will initially be asked to uncover the secrets of a mysterious ship which has floated into the harbour at Akbah. Vital to Rhama's success will be his two female companions: Faith and Mihoko. As you would expect, each will have their own particular skills, and although the player does not directly control them, they can be given commands to help solve problems and fight enemies. A monkey called Calverley will also feature, his size and agility offering access to otherwise unreachable locations.

The team is adamant that the puzzle mechanics will not rely solely on lever-pulling drudgery. Instead players will be faced with a combination of object, ability and companion based problems. A pop-up menu enables the player to select the commands to give to Rhama's companions, and a lock-on function aids both combat and puzzle solving. "There will be absolutely no blocks to push in this game," adds Gard, with a wry smile.

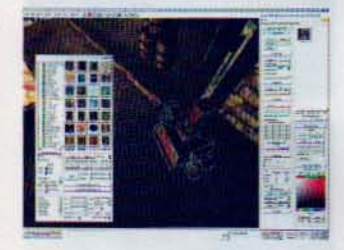
In essence the lock-on will work by indicating the player's intent. A bunch of keys hanging from a jailer's belt, for instance, will be able to be targeted by the player from some distance away. Rhama can then rush past the guard and will grab the keys in one fluid motion. "That has been the whole trick from the beginning," says Gard. "The other advantage of lock-on is that it is very clear to you what you can use, rather than being in that situation where you are standing next to everything and pressing the X-button."

In one situation Rhama must navigate a series of stalactites, and the player has the choice of jumping freely from one to the other or can use the more accurate lock-on system. In practice the option is selected by pressing one button and a cursor appears in a firstperson perspective. It is then moved to the desired object which is highlighted. "The lock-on facility is an integral part of the way that he works," explains Gard. "It's how you use objects, it's how you fight characters, its even a part of getting around the environments if you want to do it that way."

The combat system will also take advantage of Rhama's fluid realtime animation. Although this is still in the process of being implemented, the team expects it to be simple but flexible. In theory, Rhama will be able to lock on to a cutlass sticking out of a beam, then run up to it, pluck it from the wood, and slay a foe all in one smooth action. "It's a different way of dealing with combat that we're doing," explains Gard. "It is all motion-based combat – hand-to-hand and swordplay as well, largely based on kung fu, but again really easy to pick up. It's more about how you position your character and less about going toe to toe with an







The game editor which Confounding Factor has built from the ground up is a powerful and versatile tool. Gard can play through any section deciding when and where to tweak the environments and gameplay



"The script for the game was written around the puzzles, and the whole story is integrated with the gameplay. You can't have one without the other, and to keep gameplay interesting levels are very different in their layout designs"





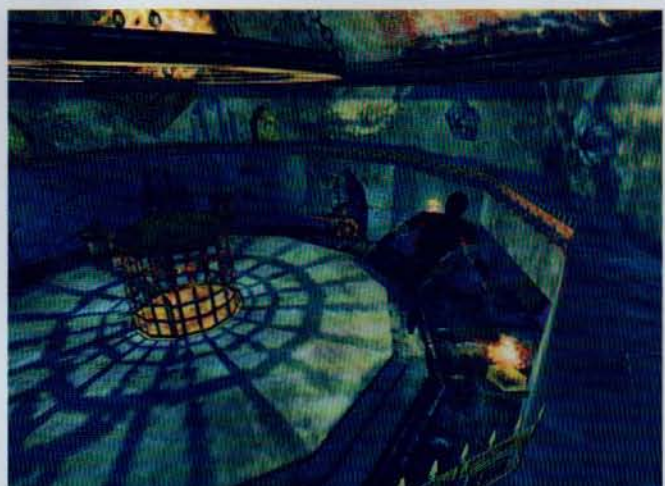
opponent. It should be very direct."

Crucially, *Galleon* has been designed for a console and not a PC market (although a PC version will be released after its initial appearance). Every element of the game is geared towards immediacy and accessibility, with analogue controls in mind. Confounding Factor is confident of getting the game out this year, and is hopeful that the title will become either an XBox or GameCube launch title. But whichever platform gets the game first, the others will soon follow. The PlayStation2 version will have slightly less detail in the textures (a result of VRAM issues), but will not suffer otherwise.

A key factor in *Galleon's* success on console will be the simplicity of control. "We have made a conscious











decision to keep the interface down to a minimum," says Tector. "It's to combat the whole thirdperson thing where you have a mass of buttons in order to try and get the moves you want to get, and instead to create an incredibly easy to pick up control system – albeit one that has an enormous amount of depth to it. So although we can do a mass of different actions which are fairly impressive, you don't have to press loads of buttons to achieve this."

Mihoko (above) is just one of Rhama's companions who can be commanded to help with both combat and puzzle solving. A simple pop-up menu will display the instructions which can then be selected with a movement of the analogue stick. Accessibility is Gard's key goal

Custom technology

The Confounding Factor team is proud of its achievements. It has taken four years to reach this stage, partly because all the technology has been built from the ground up. "That is the main ethic we have here – the re-use of everything we've made," explains Tector. "We could have shown you the demo running in our tool because we have spent a huge amount of time developing an in-house editor. This is where all the levels and the whole animation system is edited. The bulk of the animation data is generated in *Max*, but the way that you create the inter-relations for the animations are all laid out in the editor. [Gard] could run through the level and think, 'I don't like the way you slide on that slope just before that jump', and then just bring up the poly editing and tweak things around and continue playing through the levels. So that's going to reduce our tweaking time."

But surely the team must have realised the technology would have taken such a long time to perfect? When the laughter subsides, Gard is honest about the delays: "No, we were hoping for two years, but things just became more complicated." It is not difficult to understand, then, why he is reluctant to talk about any of the methods involved. The broad sweep of what has been achieved is discussed, but specifics are left for the protective publishers to brush away with smiles and apologies.

"At the core it is a blended skeletal animation system," proffers Tector. "But what we choose to blend and the way we query the environment is so complex that you end up with very location-based animations. Rather than a refrigerator box sliding around the environment, it's actually finding particular positions to land on. To pull off a jump and actually land on just a teeny point right there, that's a lot of collision queries to get it running smoothly and efficiently. That's where the time has gone."

Rhama's rapid response to both input device and the surrounding environment cues is wonderful to behold. Simply put, it is three steps ahead of anything else currently on the market. An achievement even more pronounced when you consider the team is currently just 12-strong.

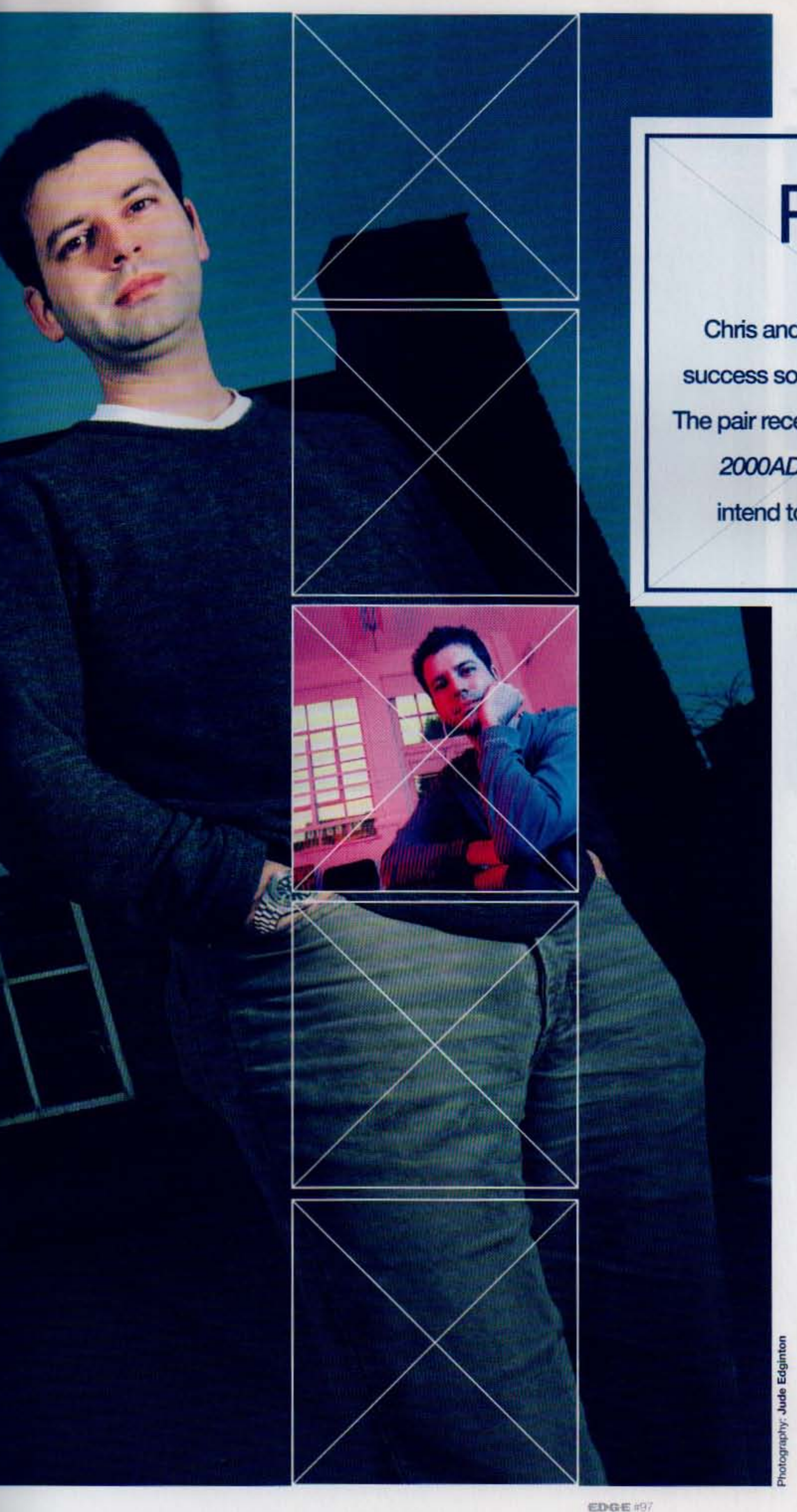
But just how much fun is *Galleon* to play? The question remains hanging in the air, because Toby Gard is still at the controls and is gleefully demonstrating another of Rhama's acrobatics: this time a run on to a solid surface perpendicular to the floor followed by a back flip and a perfect two-footed landing. "We just can't play other thirdperson games now," he concludes. After finally wrestling the controls from Gard, **Edge** begins to understand why.





Worryingly, the combat is not yet in place, but the team is hard at work to make it as fluid as everything else in the game. An array of combos are also expected to appear





Photography: **Jude Edginton**

Inside...

Rebellion

Chris and Jason Kingsley tasted phenomenal success soon after founding their own codeshop. The pair recently made headlines again after buying *2000AD*. Edge gets a glimpse of how they intend to make a return on their investment

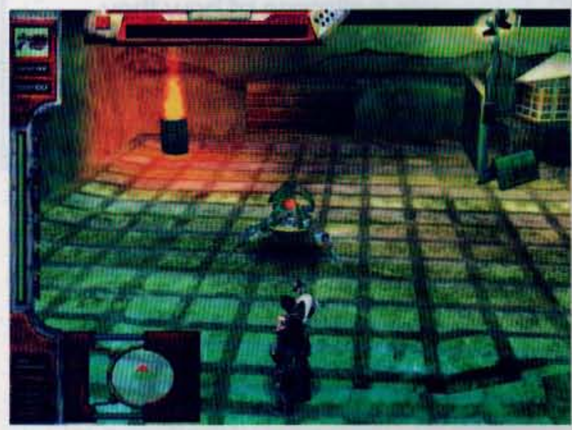
The first time **Edge** meets Rebellion owners **Chris** and **Jason Kingsley**, they're having their photograph taken in the middle of the road outside their Oxford studio. Jason looks one way, gazing into nothing and pretending to focus on the future, and Chris looks the other and watches out for cars. They both wear expression of stern disinterest, and they pout, because, after all, what's there to be happy about when you're young, rich, and own a company which fulfils another childhood dream every single day?

So, it doesn't matter that they're forever having to dodge traffic: this is serious. And then there's the aged cyclist who takes forever to wheel by, and the chain of police cars that speed down the road in hot pursuit of whatever, and then a group of freakishly cloaked Oxford infants get herded between them and the camera, and – finally – the expressions crack. Chris giggles, nervously. Jason relaxes and smiles. Passing children paw and grab at the silver umbrella reflectors, their teacher apologises, and the brothers grin. It's unreal, it's unlikely. Welcome to the Kingsley dreamworld. Welcome to the Rebellion.

Founded eight years ago, and with a softography that encompasses the critical heights of *Alien Versus Predator* on the PC and sales success of *Rainbow Six* on the PlayStation, Rebellion is growing. More than 60 people work at the studio HQ now, and then there's the acquisition of *2000AD*, a move that made the Kingsley brothers the millennial devco's Victor Kyam: they liked it so much, they bought the company. No surprise, then, that one of the two new projects **Edge** is promised a glimpse of is the much-predicted Judge Dredd firstperson shooter. The other, though, arose through different circumstances. Jason Kingsley begins the story: "What we've been trying to do

Rebellion's latest, *Wardog*, is the company's stab at coming up with its own RPG, complete with a set of original characters. The firm's *2000AD* acquisition allows it to work on the game's plot with some of that publication's writers

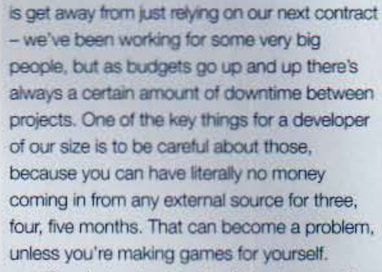








When between projects, the Kingsley brothers encourage their employees to concentrate on exploring technological avenues, with a view to include any findings in their subsequent projects



is get away from just relying on our next contract – we've been working for some very big people, but as budgets go up and up there's always a certain amount of downtime between projects. One of the key things for a developer of our size is to be careful about those, because you can have literally no money coming in from any external source for three, four, five months. That can become a problem, unless you're making games for yourself.

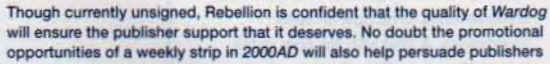
"So what we've tried to do is structure the company so we do a lot of work for other people, but we're also working for ourselves. *Gunlok* was the first one of those, and that came out reasonably well." He pauses. "But one of the things is you obviously can't have 40 people sitting around doing nothing – they wouldn't like it, we wouldn't like it. So what we've tried to do is create our own titles, prototypes, and, in some cases, finished titles."

Later on, **Edge** sees one of those prototypes: a lightly fogged 3D Victorian town Rebellion likes to use as its calling card. It's massive, throwing obscene amounts of polygons around the screen in the name of atmosphere, and it has completely dynamic lighting and sound effects. At any stage, the user can pause the action and manipulate the range, position, and effect of the icons visible in editing mode. When playing, a keypress and a burst of morphing FMV turns the character into a werewolf: the graphics switch to inverted black and white, with smells visible in lucid trails of pink, and sounds warped into high-pitched chattering. It's stunning, but it's throwaway, an experiment in engine dynamics and show-off technology. The unsigned game **Edge** is shown is different; it's called *Wardog*, and Jason explains its genesis: "Wardog was an attempt to create our own RPG, with our own characters. We started before we concluded the deal with *2000AD*, so it's very important to us because it predates the *2000AD* acquisition. However, in terms of the story we're working with some very good *2000AD* writers, and we're going to try and introduce the story to people in the *Judge Dredd Megazine* before the game comes out."

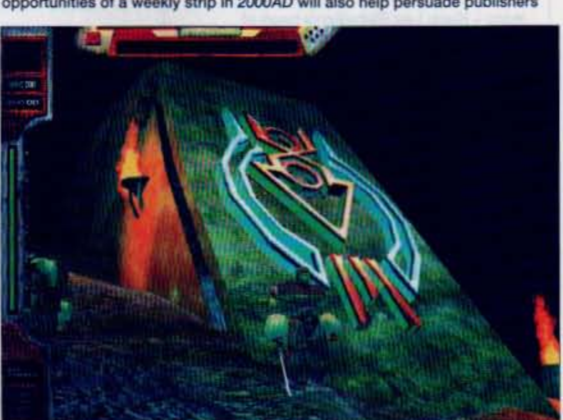
"As budgets go up, there is always a certain amount of downtime between projects. A devco our size has to be careful about that"







Though currently unsigned, Rebellion is confident that the quality of *Wardog* will ensure the publisher support that it deserves. No doubt the promotional opportunities of a weekly strip in *2000AD* will also help persuade publishers







In other words, the story's Rebellion's own, but it's going to be sharpened up by prolific scripter Dan Abnett, which is no bad thing in an industry where polygons come first and words are an afterthought. The story's strong, albeit derivative. Set in a dystopian future – what else could spring from Rebellion's fevered fanboy dreams? – the player takes the role of cranially crippled BombHead Wardog who has no recollection of his life pre-explosive-op. It's a non-linear classic RPG with freeform mini-adventures taking place around the overriding quest of self-discovery, and the player can do as many or as few of these as they choose. Some, though, will carry a slightly greater incentive than others. If another person asks him to do something, it's wise for Wardog to carry the quest out with some haste, since every BombHead has – yes – a bomb in their head, and some tasks involve a timer.

It's a novel idea, and its execution is impressive. The zones already landscaped are large and richly textured, and the 'Bladerunner'-meets-'Mad Max' audio provides some clue to the atmosphere Rebellion's *Wardog* squad are aiming for. Combat is interesting, too, being an amalgamation of realtime and turn-based action. Each enemy has different body parts that can be targeted, and undamaged parts of enemies may be salvaged and sold. Does the player go for the fast kill and aim for the robot's brain, or disable it and maximise profit by selling the silicon?

PC pigeonholes

It's different, but the overall concept means *Wardog*'s definitely a game that fits into one of the PC's acutely pigeonholed genres: the RPG. Lead artist and designer Julian Breddy confesses that this is currently a key issue with PC development, and that – limiting as it is – developers are forced to try and push at the boundaries of a genre while staying firmly ensconced within it.

"That is very much an issue, yeah," says

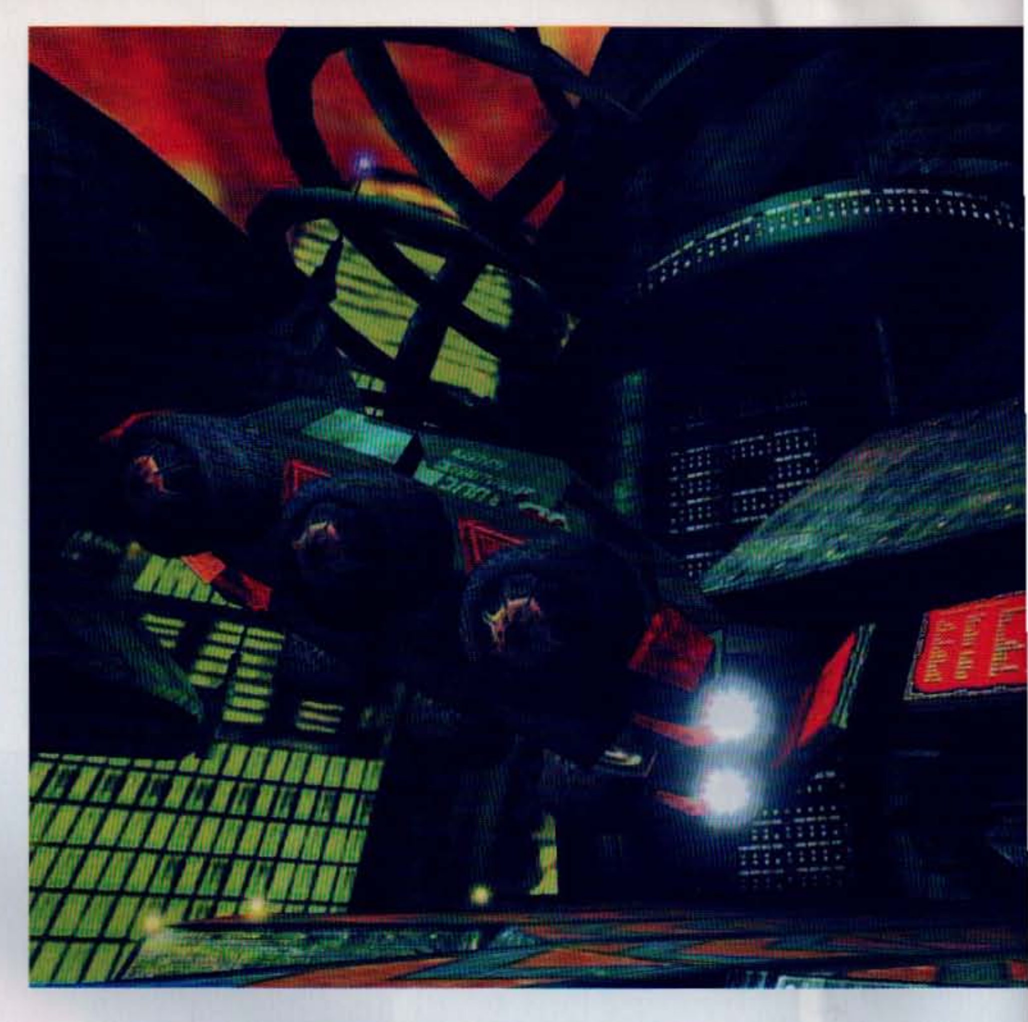


Graphic Novel Shading

Rebellion's first lawgiver shot at the Dredd universe looks to be built on solid foundations. A chat with the core of the team – Kevin Lea (Rebellion's head of programming), Tim Jones (lead artist and designer), and Drew Cope (environment and character design, and, apparently, 'conceptual visualisation') – reveals a passion for and understanding of the Dredd universe that's been absent in most other shots at the licence.

Two things really impress. First, the world will be rendered with a technique Rebellion has labelled 'Graphic Novel Shading'. Though it's not dissimilar to *Jet Set Radio*'s pioneering cel-shading, Rebellion's technique is much subtler and carries a richer, deeper feel. The engine handles multiple light sourcing, and, when faced with displaying a black character on a black background, will highlight the underside edges in a contrasting light yellow, a technique prevalent in the sort of comic artistry Rebellion is attempting to emulate. It's an interesting concept, but more importantly, it works: when Kevin Lea switches the effect on, it transforms the *Alien Vs Predator* level it's processing into something straight out of a Dark Horse novel.

The second thing stuns even more. On the same game level, Lea stabs a key which flips the engine into curve mode, and smooths out all the angular surfaces on a metallic statue of an Alien. All vertices that previously joined at sharp points can now be defined as curved, and as the player moves closer and closer to them they break up into an increasing amount of polygons. No matter how close you are to an arc in *Dredd Vs Death*, it'll always remain curved, and fans of Dredd will realise automatically how important this is in a future world where curved surfaces are architecturally omnipresent. The formula works dynamically, too, meaning that it can be set to automatically compensate for frame-rate adjustments, or to meet a polygon-per-scene cap rate. Best of all, Rebellion has the code up and running on both PC and PlayStation2, meaning that PS2 owners can expect to see the same visions of Mega City 1 as their XBox-owning brethren, albeit with reduced texture splendour.



Chris. "If you want to try and do something that doesn't fit neatly into a genre, then how do you describe it? It's also an issue with publishers – trying to sell a game to them that doesn't fit neatly into a category."

Jason interrupts: "Because most publishers, distributors, and, for that matter, retail shops have slots for a certain number of titles of certain genres. So if you say to them: 'This is a sort of hybrid of this, this and this', they won't be able to work out which category it fits in, and, to be honest, people don't know until a game's finished whether it's a good game or not. It may look great, but it may not play well. I think it's a real problem."

With the advent of the less genre-phobic XBox, is it a problem serious enough to lead to the PC's downfall? Chris is adamant that it won't: "I don't think the PC's going to have a downfall. I think it's a very strong, flexible format, and I think that as a device it does a lot of things other than games that people need."

"The PC's definitely here to stay," agrees Jason. "One of the great things about it – that people don't discuss too much – is the idea that people can buy a really good machine and say they're going to do word processing, or their homework, and in reality most PCs are bought for games. It's social camouflage."

Still, confident in the PC or not, it doesn't change the fact that Chris and Jason are sinking an awful lot of time, effort, and money into *Wardog* without the comfort blanket of a publisher at the end of it. It's clearly the sort of game they want to make – the sort of vision Rebellion was borne out of, the sort of sci-fi dream that's sounds like its been ripped straight from the pages of *2000AD* and made digital. But maybe it's not the sort of game its accountants would like Rebellion to be producing.

"If you want to try and do something that doesn't fit neatly into a genre, then how do you sell it? It's also an issue with publishers"

"There's always that conflict," explains Jason. "But we never set Rebellion up to make shitloads of money in a very short space of time. I mean, it's a nice outcome to be comfortably well off, but more importantly it's great to be working with a bunch of good guys who are all creative, and are enthusiastic about the games they want to make. And we're still enthusiastic about the product."

Game as 'product'? Surely this isn't a sign of the gaming Kingsleys turning into marketing

Rebellion is working hard to realise Mega City One in all its dystopian glory for the developer's Judge Dredd-based FPS, currently titled *Dredd Vs Death*









men? Jason's quick to atone: "It depends how hungry you are as a developer. We turn projects down. A couple of years ago we got asked to do a golf game, and I said: 'Thanks, but we don't play golf, we can't get enthusiastic about it'. And they came back with a much improved offer, but the point wasn't the money. The point was I don't think we can do – or could at that stage have done – a really good golf game. You have to have certain principles."

However, principles come at a price. As does growth: clearly, with all their time spent striking deals and wooing the press, Chris and Jason don't get much time to get their hands dirty in code and pixels. Chris may wax lyrical about the purity of the register, instruction timings and 'classical' structure of the GBA, but Jason's keen to stress their approach these days is much less hands-on: "We have staff to consider, their welfare, we also have running a business as well to consider. What we don't do now – what I don't particularly do – is do graphics on the game, or work on the detail of the gameplay. But we oversee it. It is a conflict. I mean, I'm sure people get bored listening to

FAQ

Company name: Rebellion

Founded: 1992

HQ: Oxford

Number of employees: 70

Softography: *Aliens Vs Predator* (Jaguar, PC); *Checkered Flag* (Jaguar); *Skyhammer* (Jaguar); *Rainbow 6* (PS); *Klustar* (GBC); *Asterix: The Search For Dogmatix* (GBC); *Mission: Impossible* (GBC); *Gunlok* (PC); *The Mummy* (PS, PC, DC)

Projects in development: *Wardog*; *Dredd Vs Death*; a special forces game; three PlayStation games; five Game Boy Advance games


Chris Kingsley
CTO
Jason Kingsley
CEO

us pontificate about stuff, but it's quite difficult sometimes to keep your level of enthusiasm up, especially when you're launching a project, and you've said the same things 25 times."

He finishes the declaration with substantially less enthusiasm than he began it, presumably recalling the faces of blank, imbecilic journos and the hell of demoing projects at ECTS. Chris takes the baton: "But all this stuff, it's very important. It's not just about making games, there's more to it than the development side. You've got to let people know about it. It's a symbiotic relationship between us and the magazines."

And suffering these things is symptomatic of an industry that's still maturing, albeit slowly?

"I think we're still going through growing pains," says Jason. "I think we're somewhere around the mid-adolescence stage, in terms of human development."

Chris interrupts: "Definitely post-puberty."

Jason continues: "I think one of the areas I'm pleased about is TIGA [The Independent Game Developers Association], which Chris and I have been very involved in, right from the very beginning – not just founder members but actually putting the whole thing together in the first place. I think that's a sign of maturity where competitors can discuss issues for the whole industry together. Small people can get help from big people. I think that's important."

The final thing **Edge** is shown is early engine code for Rebellion's new project, a firstperson shooter based in the Judge Dredd universe. The working title is *Dredd Vs Death*, and though there's little game to speak of, the work in progress looks promising. Dredd's modelled on the Carlos Ezquerra interpretation, and while it's really only the technology at the moment that's really astounding, it's interesting that the first decent interpretation of the Dredd universe may well come from its owners. If you want something doing properly, do it yourself. **Edge** wanders away from the team, past a mountainous stack of megazines and assorted *2000AD* ephemera, and back to the brothers Kingsley.

The trip to Rebellion ends as it begun: with Chris and Jason having their photo taken, now on the roof of their expansive studio. They're surrounded by hundreds of years of academic tradition, and stood on top of a dream electronic future they've grown from nothing. The flat roof, hidden among Oxford's spires, overlooks a garden overrun with weeds, and at the back of that sits an old ambulance.

"We bought it for a film we once made," says Chris. "Make us an offer," adds Jason, still trying to do business, still trying to keep a straight face. **Edge**'s photographer glances down at the disused ambulance, checks to see if the Kingsleys are serious, and then agrees to do just that. They pose again. Click. Unlikely. Click. Grin. Another deal. Click. Another victory for the Rebellion.















Dredd devotees are unlikely to be disappointed with the way in which Rebellion is bringing city vistas that are more traditionally rendered in two dimensions. These screenshots attest to the way in which the developer has captured the essence of the comic strip

Edge Awards 2001



The first wave of the new generation over, **Edge** looks back on a year that has seen new consoles' software catalogues bed in, old formats burn brightly before passing into history, and developers devise new twists on old themes. Despite the industry being in transition, it's been boomtime for good games.

After too many hours of debate, the winners of the year were decided upon. The next seven pages pay tribute to them

Game of the Year

Although 'time played' was not the only criterion by which this year's nominees were judged, the three winners distinguished themselves by consuming a ludicrous number of hours from the **Edge** team's lives. Excellent in significant areas and further confounding the notion that this has been a slump year for games were *Tempest 3000*, *Deus Ex*, *Mr Driller*, and *Black & White*.

3

2





1

Just one aspect of *PSO*'s brilliance is its hotkey command system, making for tense battle scenes

1 WINNER

Phantasy Star Online

And your favourite *Phantasy Star Online* moment is? From building an idiosyncratic personality through to intercontinental chit-chat and destroying the Ruin's boss with only one Moon Atomiser potion in reserve, Yuji Naka's magnum opus is an all-round winner. A defining moment in console gaming engendering devotion and friendships in abundance.

Developer	Sonic Team
Format	Dreamcast
Publisher	Sega

2 RUNNER-UP

Perfect Dark

It may not have revolutionised the FPS with quite the same verve as its predecessor *GoldenEye*, but *Perfect Dark* added depth, gadgets, and secondary weapon functions to a title boasting some of the best level designs ever created. Thirty oneplayer challenges, a Training mode, and thoughtfully constructed multiplayer arenas more than complement a rich package.

Developer	Rare
Format	N64
Publisher	Rare

3 RUNNER-UP

Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask

While many of the exquisite elements from *Ocarina* remained, the use of character-transforming masks combined with a novel 72-hour chronology made for a wonderfully new Link adventure. *Majora's Mask* constantly surprises, and in inimitable Nintendo fashion allows the player to explore every blade of grass and secluded lily pond to uncover secrets and subgames.

Developer	Nintendo
Format	N64
Publisher	Nintendo

Gameplay Innovation

Planet Ring and *Phantasy Star Online*, Sega's two attempts at global union, won plaudits, and *Typing Of The Dead*, *Koro Koro Kirby*, *Vib Ribbon*, and *Samba de Amigo* were all also considered. *Black & White* astounded, proving worthy of three years' worth of hype, but it was another PC game, *Deus Ex*, that took the vote for its simple open twist on a well-trod FPS path.



2

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1

The apparent freedom of choice *Deus Ex* presents to the player takes immersion to a new level

1 WINNER

Deus Ex

Another PC game, another RPG/FPS; except *Deus Ex* is different. With stunning freedom of choice, both in working to a mission goal and weaving through the intelligent, non-linear plotline, Warren Spector's masterpiece deserves to impact on gaming like few others. If one title offers hope for the future of the interactive movie, this is it.

Developer	Ion Storm
Format	PC/Mac
Publisher	Eidos

2 RUNNER-UP

Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask

Simply put, the use of chronology in *Majora's Mask* is staggering. Though players only have a 72-hour period to complete the quest, Link's ability to manipulate time through the use of his ocarina results in a wonderfully non-linear experience. The complexity of the activities within Clock Town together with the villagers' lives only becomes apparent after many hours of engaging play.

Developer	Nintendo
Format	N64
Publisher	Nintendo

3 RUNNER-UP

Planet Ring

The ostensibly simple approach of *Planet Ring* masks some deeply innovative gameplay. Managing to incorporate a host of community building concepts and co-operative gameplay into otherwise straightforward party games, its finest moment was *Dream Dorobo*, which requires players to direct each other through a maze using the Dreamcast microphone

Developer	Sega
Format	Dreamcast
Publisher	Sega

Graphical Achievement

The past year has seen some potent graphical feats. Predictably, the PC had its share of contenders, with *Black & White*, *Evolva*, and *Giants* making it into the finalists' group. Style alone offered Sega's *Cosmic Smash* coin-op a chance, yet taking a console's technical limitations into account also opened the door for *Banjo-Tooie*, *Perfect Dark*, the sumptuous 2D beauty of *Guilty Gear X*, and, of course, *Phantasy Star Online*.



3





2

1

Above the grubby streets of a Neo-Tokyo skates *JSR*'s hero in a tremendous illusion of 2D in 3D

1 WINNER

Jet Set Radio

While the majority of games nowadays simply up the polygon count, *Jet Set Radio* goes to the trouble of revolutionising the graphical style. Cel shading may well turn out to be the equivalent of the now-predictable lens flare, but few titles will ever be able claim to make use of the technique as convincingly and as appropriately as *Jet Set Radio* does.

Developer	Smile Bit
Format	Dreamcast
Publisher	Sega

2 RUNNER-UP

Tempest 3000

An unorthodox game designed by an unorthodox programmer on an unorthodox 'gaming platform'. *Tempest 3000*'s vector psychedelia should enthrall the majority of those discernible enough to procure themselves a copy of Jeff Minter's latest Red Bull-fuelled creation – unquestionably one of the most visually stimulating experiences of the year.

Developer	Jeff Minter
Format	Nuon
Publisher	Hasbro

3 RUNNER-UP

Metropolis Street Racer

An absurd amount of photographs and video footage taken on recon missions to the three cities featured in the game, together with the DC's generous texture memory and the team's insatiable attention to detail, resulted in one of the most realistic-looking racing games to have graced living rooms to date, and one that makes superior use of its host machine's capabilities.

Developer	Bizarre Creations
Format	Dreamcast
Publisher	Sega

Technical Achievement

Tempest 3000 provided a stunning demonstration of what the Nuon chip can do when put to good use, while *Smuggler's Run* and *Le Mans 24 Hours* on Dreamcast both featured some of the most impressive draw distances ever witnessed in driving games, and *Vib Ribbon* pioneered rhythm-responsive gameplay, but in the end it came down to Yu Suzuki's masterpiece to lead the field of technical achievement.

1

For creating an easily accessible, visually compelling online world, *PSO* deserves all of its plaudits



2





3

1 WINNER

Phantasy Star Online

Excelling in so many areas, be it consummately striking graphics or the unique ingame translation system, *Phantasy Star Online*'s chief achievement is that of providing an online experience which integrates a compelling interface with proficient server-side technology. It is unlikely that the technical achievements of *PSO* will be exceeded by any other Dreamcast title.

Developer	Sonic Team
Format	Dreamcast
Publisher	Sega

2 RUNNER-UP

Alien Resurrection

Proving that there is room for technical innovation on the original PlayStation even after the release of newer hardware, Argonaut squeezed every last bit of juice out of the old grey box to create an insanely atmospheric firstperson shooter in *Alien Resurrection*, which benefits from superior audio and visuals that put other PSone titles to shame.

Developer	Argonaut
Format	PlayStation
Publisher	Fox Interactive

3 RUNNER-UP

Quake III Revolution

Bullfrog and id have succeeded in transferring the PC firstperson shooter dynamic to the PlayStation2, and overcoming the constraints of a DualShock controller and the much-publicised difficulties of the platform itself, *Quake III Revolution* is a smooth, compulsive, and technically impressive shooter that retains all the appeal of its predecessors.

Developer	Bullfrog/id
Format	PlayStation2
Publisher	EA

Audio Achievement

Samba de Amigo's take on 'Take On Me' proved popular, as did *Vib Ribbon*'s near-infinite soundtrack, but three titles stood clear from the rest. While *Tempest*'s audio hypnotised the player, and *Jet Set Radio*'s transformed the game from simply credible to ultra-cool, it was *Alien Resurrection*'s stunning use of effects that impressed – and terrified – the most.





2



3

1

The deeply chilling soundtrack to *Alien Resurrection* is an object lesson in how to induce panic and fear

1 WINNER

Alien Resurrection

Proving that a minimalist route to sound is often more effective that audio overkill, *Resurrection*'s effects track was a lesson in fear. The review in E88 contained all you need to know. "The distant screaming and scratching on metal, the tip-tapping that gets closer, and the lack of enemies, anywhere. Until... screech, panic, scream." **Edge** did.

Developer	Argonaut
Format	PlayStation
Publisher	Fox Interactive

2 RUNNER-UP

Tempest 3000

If you could feed screenshots of *Tempest* into a stereo, and if you could combine it with a trance compilation circa '92, and if you could output the results to a single white tablet that would permanently alter your perception of videogame music, then you still wouldn't be close to the beat-perfect interplay between Jeff Minter's Nuon work and its beat-perfect soundtrack.

Developer	Jeff Minter
Format	Nuon
Publisher	Hasbro

3 RUNNER-UP

Jet Set Radio

Transforming the graffitti-strewn streets of Neo Tokyo into something credible took cel-shading; pushing them into the realm of cool required something more. The key was a soundtrack taking in the best of scratched-up Japanese hip hop, striking warped basslines, and schoolgirl giggle weirdness. The addition of Jurassic 5 and Mix Master Mike to the western release only helped.

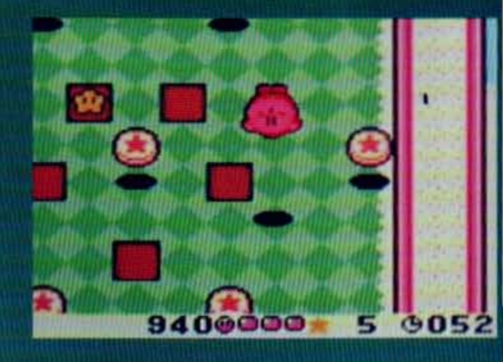
Developer	Smile Bit
Format	Dreamcast
Publisher	Sega

Hardware Innovation

The Nuon, *Police 24/7*, and *Arctic Thunder*'s seat and wind technology were all suggested, but this was a three-gadget race, and after much disagreement, Yuji Naka's brave re-introduction of the maraca to pop culture scooped the honours.









1 WINNER

Samba de Amigo

Samba de Amigo brought millions of people into ska'd-up living rooms across the world to shake their shakers. Casual and hardcore games united at last under the spell of a peripheral that was pure genius; perhaps not technically, but certainly in terms of concept and fun.

Developer | Sonic Team
Format | Dreamcast
M'facturer | Sega

2 RUNNER-UP

Game Boy Advance

The casual observer may wonder why the inevitable miniaturisation of existing technology is anything to get excited about, but revisiting old genre stereotypes and lazy Super Famicom ports are a small price to pay for a machine which could put the game back into gaming.

M'facturer | Nintendo

3 RUNNER-UP

Kuru Kuru Kirby

Devolving a Game Boy into a decades-old ball and maze puzzle may not seem the best example of progress, but the use of cart-based motion-sensing technology to introduce a whole new control method is. Now, if only the screen didn't disappear when you tilt it too far...

Developer | Nintendo
Format | Game Boy
M'facturer | Nintendo

Coin-op of the Year

One of the most difficult categories to judge, simply because great arcade games are becoming more and more difficult to track down, Coin-op of the Year presented a minor headache. The three finalists still shine









1 WINNER

Mr Driller 2

A remarkably simple idea, bettered by the inclusion of the rather obvious twoplayer option oddly absent from the original incarnation, as well as the odd extra character and new items. Wisely, Namco refrained from messing with the game's beautifully pure spirit.

M'facturer | Namco

2 RUNNER-UP

Kart Duel

The technology up on the screen may be yesterday's news (the cabinet is powered by what amounts to PS1 technology), but the surrounding detail makes it one memorable experience, providing seat-of-your-pants driving action unlike any karting game before or since.

M'facturer | Namco

3 RUNNER-UP

Arctic Thunder

It's easy to sneer at Midway's racing games, consisting, as they do, of generally lightweight, almost tongue-in-cheek action, but *Arctic Thunder* proves insanely entertaining almost despite itself, with power-ups galore, a staggering sensation of speed, and great multiplayer.

M'facturer | Midway

Publisher of the Year

Perhaps the easiest category to judge, the only contenders that came close to rivalling Sega were Capcom, for the sheer diversity and solidity of its catalogue, which included *Code Veronica*, *Onimusha*, and the traditional staple beat 'em ups, and Nintendo for the quality of its smaller release schedule, which included *Mario Tennis* and *The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask*.







1

Encompassing the likes of Daytona, MSR and Shenmue, Sega's release schedule has been unsurpassed over the past year

1 WINNER

Sega

Over the past year Sega has endeavoured to release titles ranging from the eccentric to the groundbreaking. While the quality of its releases make the demise of the DC all the more inexplicable, it also bodes well for the company's future as a publisher. Here's to the likes of *Seaman*, *Samba de Amigo*, and *PSO* on other platforms.



Developer of the Year



Never an easy one to judge – on quantity alone, the ever-productive Capcom would have easily walked away with it. In terms of quality consistency, others such as Konami, Rare, Codemasters and Nintendo certainly would have had their say. But ultimately, the decision must also consider innovation and execution.







1

Yuji Naka shows off his lovely maracas for the delirious *Samba de Amigo* (above), while *PSO* followed at end of the year (left)

1 WINNER

Sonic Team

Although the least productive of those considered, with just two titles bearing its distinctive blue logo over the last 12 months, Sonic Team's wonderfully innovative *Samba de Amigo* and the astounding *PSO* (see Game of the Year), formed a standard-setting, impressively diverse alliance.



Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Broadly speaking, scores correspond to the following sentiments: one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Videogames on the **Edge**

This month's unanimous choices...

Operation Flashpoint

Edge's foray into one Russian-held town ended in tragedy, with the player character the sole survivor from a squad of ten. Naturally, **Edge** hid in the woods



(PC) Codemasters

Anarchy Online

Under the twin suns of this breathtaking online world, **Edge** continues its search for ever bigger guns. The life of a bureaucrat has never been so exciting



(PC) Funcom

GoldenEye

After playing the satisfyingly console-centric *Halo* at Gamestock this month, it was time to dust off the daddy of console shooters to relive fond memories.



(N64) Nintendo

1942

A recent retro event allowed **Edge** to show off on this most enduring coin-op shooter. A mesmerising blast – until someone decided to turn the machine off.



(Coin-op) Capcom

Maintaining focus

Sometimes small is beautiful

When the email arrived – a request for **Edge** to try PomPom Software's first budget offering – no one on the magazine had heard of *Space Tripper* (below). A week later, and even the most PC-phobic members of the editorial team have been absorbed by its hypnotic simplicity. Swearing at the office's games machines isn't anything new, but when the vitriol's being aimed at your own inadequacy to avoid alien fire rather than some esoteric soon-to-be problem or hardware conflict, it has to be a step forward.

Not that this is a huge surprise, since the renaissance of shareware gaming on the PC has promised something like this for a while. Though much of the community's talent has been drawn towards mod making, recent releases have shown that not everyone developing for the PC wants to invent new and more interesting ways to shoot people. Witness the cultish phenomenon of *Elastomania*, the real physics *Excitebike* clone, or the retina-scarring success of *Spheres Of Chaos*. As big projects they'd be considered high-risk, but as small games they're brilliant.

And then there's *Desperados*: a low-risk, big-budget project, where a talented team appears to have spent two years rewriting *Commandos*. In so many cases, bloated development times appear to destroy innovation, and it's clear why: for a company to justify investing so much time in a single title, it has to be absolutely certain of a financial return. For the PC that means producing a three-letter abbreviation – RTS, RPG, or FPS – and then trying to push at the boundaries defined by each. For *Desperados* that means setting the action in the Wild West: cute, but far from revolutionary.

But while devcos feel the burn of the industry recession, there's one platform that starts to look more and more appealing: Game Boy Advance. Without the capacity for huge amounts of polygon pushing or epic FMV, and with an unrestricted global audience, development costs are fairly low and rewards are potentially huge. There is a GBA development method that's even cheaper, but the hope is that companies will return to old-skool design values and not just rely on a slew of SNES ports. Not that **Edge** would reject the chance to play *Street Fighter II* on the go, but the GBA is already showing it can offer much more. With the success of the first wave of titles, particularly Nintendo's fantastically simple *Kuru Kuru Kururin*, a downsized industry future may not be the disaster that doomsayers have predicted.





068



070



072



074



Ring Of Red

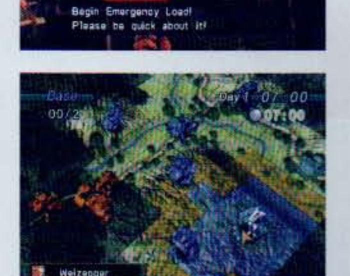
Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Q3**

R*ing Of Red* is a turn-based strategy game featuring big robots engaged in pseudo-realtime combat sequences, which is interspersed with lengthy cut-scenes and equally protracted talking heads dialogue. So it's fairly safe to say that it bears little in the way of obvious mainstream appeal.

However, by challenging the player with a supremely balanced risk-reward profile through offering finely poised combat bouts in the short term, and by demanding the thoughtful marshalling of robot and infantry over the course of several missions in the longer term, Konami has managed to create a wonderfully gripping title.

Set in an alternate-history post-World War II Japan, in which Armoured Fighting Walkers (AFWs) are the war machine of choice, the action in *Ring Of Red* is wrapped up in a somewhat convoluted Cold War-themed narrative. Each mission is preceded by a lengthy synopsis of the relevant ersatz historical events, and each sortie surrounded by dialogue between the characters that make up the player's forces. While the narrative can seem superfluous at times, on the whole it adds to, rather than detracts from, the sum of the game's parts, and proves to be a useful device for adding complexity and depth, chiefly by introducing new mecha (up to a total of eight) and establishing boss characters.

Starting on the training ground, the first few encounters do little to convey the eventual intricacy of *Ring Of Red*, or the way in which, as the game progresses, it becomes more and more difficult to stop playing. The game is played out on grid-overlaid maps, with mecha on either side taking it in turns to manoeuvre, recover, and engage each other in combat. There is also the opportunity to win new infantry recruits by moving on to squares containing a building. If this sounds simple, it's because it is, but it's the judiciously composed interplay between the very specific capabilities of each mecha and its infantry escorts, managing time limits and tougher combat conditions at night, always with a view to preserving forces for later missions, that proves so compelling.

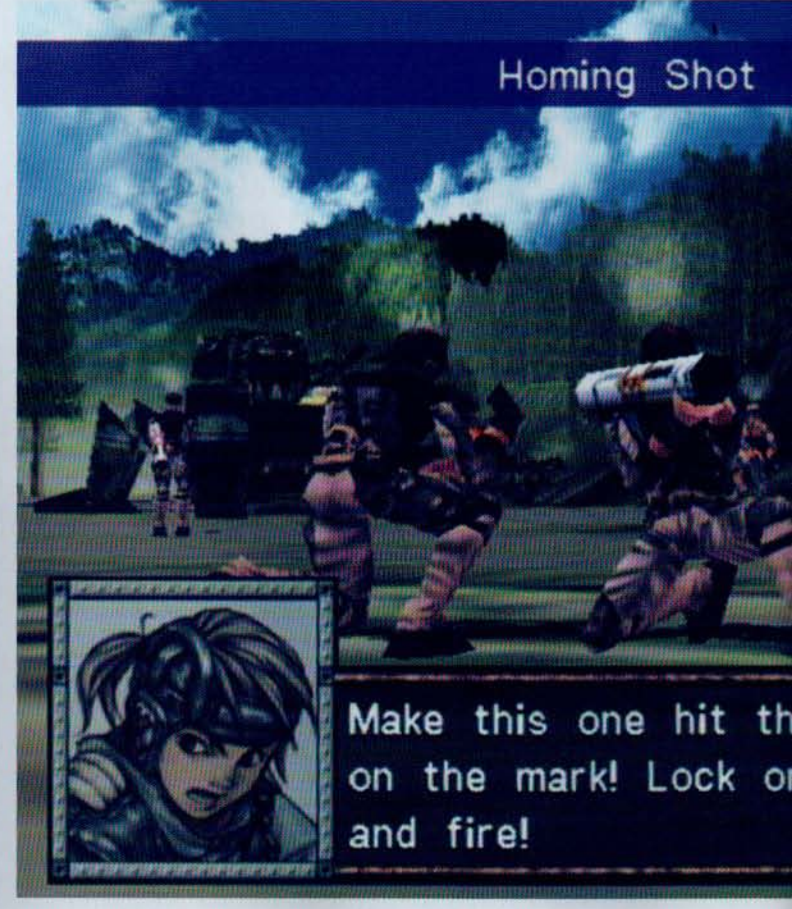






Turn-based manoeuvring management of units is a central part of the game, but an engaging plot and a balanced structure take the game beyond the sum of its parts

The essential underlying principle is that of a cerebral game of Chicken, which in practice proves to be a mesmerising one



Pseudo-realtime combat is played out primarily through cut-scenes, but co-ordinating the timing of attacks while taking the time to aim at enemy mecha requires maximum concentration and can be fraught

Similarly, individual combat encounters are deceptively simple. Each encounter has a fixed duration during which mecha fire upon each other, chiefly by waiting for an accuracy gauge to steadily fill up. The essential underlying principle is that of a cerebral game of Chicken, which in practice proves to be a mesmerising one. But to flesh out this bare-bones principle, the player is charged with managing ground troops and a roster of crew and infantry skills, as well as maintaining the optimum combat range for any given mecha. It's therefore essential to equip your fighting robots with a complementary set of infantry units (up to three) to either offset their weaknesses or to supplement their strengths. During combat, two of these units can advance or retreat from the line of fire, while the third lends their skills to the mecha's pilot. Each unit, including the pilot, has a selection of abilities ranging from speeding up load times to specialist ammunition or laying down a smoke screen.

But to reduce *Ring Of Red* to the sum of its constituent parts simply doesn't do the game justice. This is a game that draws the player in, enveloping and captivating from beginning to end and delivering a degree of satisfaction that often belies the game's mechanics. An unexpected delight.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of **ten**











As well as being able to target enemy infantry or AFWs according to their abilities, ground units also have a range of skills at their disposals with which to inflict greater damage, or otherwise augment an attack



Maintaining the optimum range for the capabilities of a particular mech is essential to a good combat performance, though not always possible if movement is hampered by special attacks or excess damage

Beating the bosses

At key moments of the game it is necessary to overcome a boss-style enemy in combat in keeping with the narrative thrust of the game. In almost all cases this requires an even more astute strategy, requiring successive attacks to gradually exhaust a considerably more dangerous foe, but it is remarkable primarily because of the way in which the narrative and game mechanics intertwine seamlessly to inject a change of pace and increase the hypnotic depth of the game.



Desperados

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **Spellbound** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**



The line-of-sight technique is cunningly woven into mechanics of the game. Unlike *Commandos* it takes into account the 3D terrain, and enemies will not be able to spot you underneath terrain obstacles



While all the environments from a pueblo village to the dusty plains have been lovingly created, the sense of interaction with most features remains limited

Concept gaming's the future, and it's easy. You take an existing product – say, *Commandos* – and then you think of a spin to put on it, like, say, setting it in the Wild West. You then sink two years of your heart, soul, and finances into what's guaranteed to be a secure investment, because the public like what they know, and the public buy what they've bought before. *Desperados* is concept gaming; *Desperados* is average; and *Desperados* is safe. But *Desperados* will sell, no doubt, and that's what's really disheartening.

Which isn't to say the game's weak or insubstantial, just that it's absolutely uninspiring. Set in New Mexico and Louisiana at the height of the Western cliché, the choice of setting is the only outstanding aspect of the game. While it is an era made for gaming, it has been curiously underused by apprehensive game developers, and the spectacular painted backdrops and well-defined details demonstrated here may go some way towards persuading devcos against timeline caution. The 2D imagery is near perfect, but there's something lacking. *Desperados* is a gorgeous point-and-click picture book, but it has a pixel-thin game dynamic.

Those familiar with *Commandos* will know *Desperados'* mechanic already. Your squad of six outlaws are sent around their bitmapped universe with a click of the mouse button. On their way they'll encounter obstacles, enemies, and scripted conversations, and it's the player's job to try and extract as much from the situations as possible, which usually comes down to forming a plan and then quicksaving a path through it.

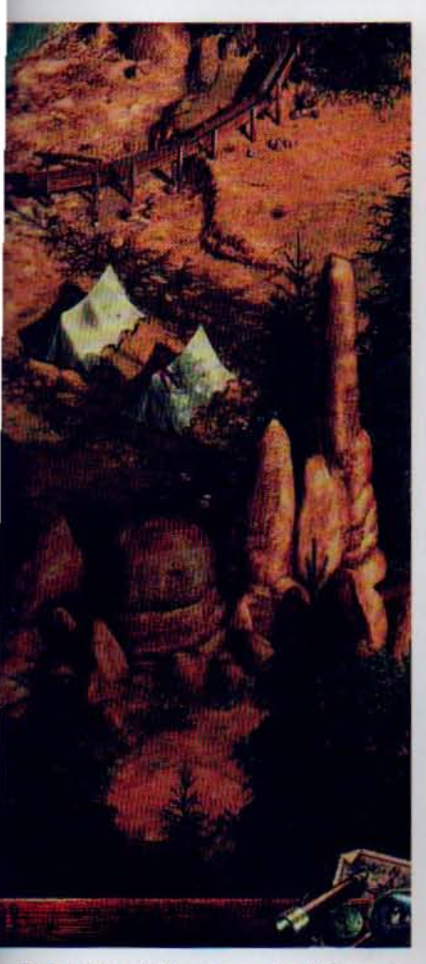
Each member of the six-person squad has their own strengths and special abilities, Wild West stereotypes all. That's no a bad thing, as Western movie culture is rooted in the formulaic character, and the referential attributes lend an authenticity to the action. But none of that changes the fact that at its basest level, *Desperados* offers a puzzle-solving challenge that never transcends finding the right peg for the right hole. It's not dynamic, and while there are multiple solutions to many of the problems, there's little incentive to find them when the only reward is to see the next pretty picture.

Still, the game improves when things get more complicated, and the game's event queuing system enables the player to set each member of the party into motion simultaneously. Getting it right is

Set in New Mexico and Louisiana at the height of the Western cliché, the choice of setting is the only outstanding aspect of the game



Learning how to co-ordinate the characters under your command is essential. The event cueing system aids planning, but once the bullets start flying the game can become a mess of clicks and bodies



Enter a building (right) and you are treated to a cross-section of its interior. Bodies can be hidden inside













While PC gamers cherish hotkeys, Spellbound's ambition to bring *Desperados* to other formats will negate such blessings. The staccato pacing of the gameplay will also find fewer fans on console

frustrating, but watching each Desperado set about his or her business and execute it with a methodical interlocking precision is almost worth it. That's partly due to the huge variety of tasks and attractive animations associated with them. Each character is delicately picked out in a handful of pixels, and impressively full of personality, though the stop-start animation pales next to the fluid 50fps polygonal movements PC gamers will be used to. That's fine; it's the stop-start dynamic that's the disappointment. The save-reload-retry structure doesn't just fail to offer adrenaline, it also destroys every moment of tension. How can you fear death when resurrection's just a keypress away?

There's a sequel already planned, which is indicative of how confident Infogrames and Spellbound are of commercial success, but this can't be the future. There has to be more intuition, more skill, more pace. *Desperados* is methodical and clinical, and while that's what the majority of those who intend to purchase it will expect, surely such expectations are much too low. Strategy needn't be frustrating, and there's no reason for an era as potentially exhilarating as the Wild West to translate into something this lifeless. Beautifully airbrushed, creatively scripted, but conceptually flawed, the game captures perfectly captures the imagery of the era, but lacks the pioneering spirit.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

A fistful of hotkeys

Controlling six people at once isn't easy, especially when you're up against what often feels like the whole of Mexico. Theoretically, all your party can be controlled via the mouse alone, but that proves impractical, since timing is crucial, and even those with *Quake*-honed mouse control will find it difficult to click quickly enough. In order to compensate, *Desperados* takes the typically unwieldy PC way out of assigning a hotkey to everything. It works reasonably well once you're a way in to the game, but for newcomers it's daunting.



Panzer Front

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **JVC** Developer: **Enterbrain** Price: **£30** Release: **May**



War is hell

Targeting distant enemies in *Panzer Front* can be an incredibly tense experience. While terrain, enemy speed, and your shells' arcing trajectory must all be taken into account for a direct hit, the opponent's anti-tank artillery exploding all around is enough to seriously put you off your aim.



Terrain types include snow, bogs and rubble-strewn cities – subtly altering tank handling











Though *Panzer Front*'s slow pace will not be to everyone's taste, the combination of organising units on the map screen and bombarding enemy installations from the confines of your own tank has been handled with some aplomb. Escaping from Berlin while Russian forces storm the city is a tense affair

Panzer Front's insistence on strategy over arcade-style immediacy demands patience, deliberation and intelligence, but comes out a better game for it. So staunch is the developer's commitment to accuracy that tanks are given gears and in extreme cases (Russian NC-152) move at ridiculously slow speeds even on the flattest of terrain. In fact, the only concession to quick-fix thrills is the infinite ammo supply, without which the game would suffer considerably.

Some 25 genuine scenarios taken from WWII comprise the missions, with the player either controlling Russian, US, or German forces. Thankfully, operations are varied and interesting enough to see even the most weary armchair general through to the end. A typical scenario will see the player supporting troops on an all-out attack on enemy bunkers. Fail to provide enough cover by taking out machine-gun installations, enemy infantry, or tanks, and the tide of the battle will change very quickly.

But this is not a game solely about pushing units around a map. *Panzer Front*'s most dynamic element rests in the use of firepower. Correct ordnance selection is vital. In essence, machine guns will take out infantry, HE shells artillery positions, and RP rounds enemy tanks. Successfully destroying an enemy just visible on the horizon requires a finely honed blend of skill and experience, but the resulting explosive cut-scene when a particularly stubborn adversary is destroyed is nothing short of exhilarating.

However, be warned: *Panzer Front* can require Kasparovian levels of concentration, and the player constantly needs to juggle scanning the map for hidden opponents, directing friendly forces, and calling on air support if any success is to be achieved. But once an enemy tank is successfully taken out by the use of guile and superior tactics, the player is likely to be hooked.

Yet for all *Panzer Front*'s attention to detail it does have some shortcomings. The front end is incredibly clumsy, and selecting some of the map functions can be ponderous and fiddly. The scenery, too, can appear and disappear at will, a factor which makes targeting enemies more frustrating than it needs to be. But graphical imperfections and minor flaws aside, *Panzer Front* still proves to be one of the best console strategy titles to have appeared in some time.

Edge rating: **Seven out of ten**

Robot Warlords

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Midas Interactive** Developer: **Dazz** Price: **£30** Release: **May 4**

Turn-based strategy games don't have to be boring. This month *Ring Of Red* is proof enough of that, not to mention titles like *Front Mission 3* and *X-Com*. At their best they can demand tactical sophistication and concentration from the player, and use the limitation of slow pacing to increase the scope of gameplay. At their worst, they have the potential to leave you confused and adrift on a sea of bewildering menus and inscrutable game mechanics.

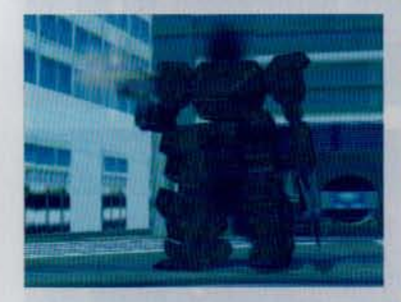
Which is where *Robot Warlords* comes in. From the start of the game the patience of the most tolerant player will be severely challenged by the seemingly endless and verbose dialogue that precedes missions. As the game progresses, these interludes prove increasingly convoluted, and worse, seem to have no bearing whatsoever on the game itself. When it comes to the game proper, which consists of a series of missions – most requiring the destruction of a certain amount of enemies within a given number of turns – the addition of cinematic cut-scenes to portray the action is also a source of monotony. Although arguably pretty, these are interminably dull, and in all likelihood will be switched off fairly swiftly.

The problem with this is that it just makes things more confusing. Without any visual clues, and with just a statistical readout to go by, it is often difficult to work out what's going on. Added to this is a menu system that is unwieldy to the point that it is almost beyond navigation. Consequently, customising mecha before combat is a mystifying process, and during missions the underlying workings of the game are so unfathomable as to make the outcome a matter of luck more than skill. And when it seems to take an age to carry out the simplest of tasks – such as commanding a mech to move forward and shoot – this rapidly becomes dispiriting. Even aurally the game suffers, with a lifeless techno soundtrack that further highlights the game's lack of atmosphere, distancing the player even more from onscreen events.

Undoubtedly there is a game underlying these shortcomings that will engage hardcore fans of either big-robot or strategy games, but with the difficulty level pitched too high and the learning curve too steep, it is such an onerous task scratching the surface that it is unlikely that many will bother.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

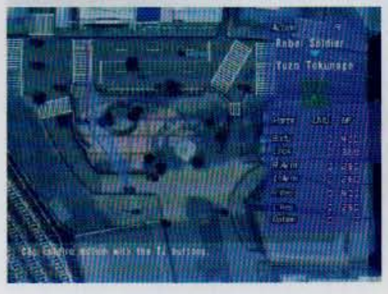








In all likelihood many gamers will find the game's cut-scenes too lengthy, distancing the player from the action rather than drawing them in. Likewise the menu system is disconcertingly unwieldy, ruining the atmosphere and pacing





With the amount of onscreen data and menus it is likely that the game is more suited to navigation by mouse rather than joypad, but another problem is that the underlying mechanics are obscured from view



Pleasing PAL gamers

Originally planned for a Japanese release under the name *Velvet File*, *Robot Warlords* is to be published in this country by Midas Interactive. The publisher's decision to pick up one of the more obscure Japanese titles for release in PAL territories is an entirely laudable one, and **Edge** hopes to see a similar approach in the future – it's just unfortunate that this particular title was chosen for release. Western gamers are unlikely to succumb to its charms.

Power Shovel Ni Norou!!

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Taito** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥5,800 (£33)** Release: **Out now (Japan) June (UK)**





One of the many less serious tasks, transferring turtles from one pool to another is great fun (above). Early jobs are far more along the lines of what you'd expect JCBs to be involved in (right)







Clearing a road of boulders using the massive PC1100 machine against a strict time limit may take a few attempts (above). Unlike the coin-op the game is based on, a second view option exists (left)

PAL version on the way

While PAL code was promised in time for this issue's deadline, JVC (which is publishing the game in Europe), was unable to provide a review copy of *Power Diggerz* (as it will be known over here). As such, and under the assurance that the PAL release would not undergo alterations (other than the obvious translation process and the removal of PocketStation compatibility), **Edge** has assessed the Japanese version of the game.

Taking a seemingly mundane activity and building a videogaming environment around it has long been an approach undertaken by developers, and is one particularly loved by the Japanese. From bus driving to pizza delivery, many aspects of everyday life have been polygonised for the sake of electronic entertainment.

Power Shovel focuses its attentions on the oft-ignored world of JCBs. As a budding digging machine operator, your task is to complete the particular assignments that every new situation throws your way. Naturally, there are the obvious construction-site related pursuits such as ensuring the back of lorries are suitably loaded with sand. But get past the first couple of levels and things soon progress from digging trenches into more surreal, and – some would say – videogame-appropriate territory. Other than smashing up cars, expect to be asked to transfer turtles from one pool to the next or pour sauce on to a giant plate of food.

The machine you opt for determines the challenges you will face. In all, three are available, from the cute and easily manoeuvrable PC30MR to the lumbering PC1100 monster. Given the complexity of the controls, initial attempts are bound to result in the seconds running out before the task is completed. Though hardly second nature, within a couple of tries the JCB mechanism becomes more familiar and progression becomes feasible.

It's regrettable, then, that anyone with reasonable hand-eye coordination will soon be seeing the end sequence. A grading system ensures some replayability, but far more substantial is the addition of a twoplayer mode, minigame options (which enable instant access to the main game's tasks), time trial, and a construction kit for those wishing to make up their own entertainment. Furthermore, an art gallery section and PocketStation compatibility add to the game.

What it may lack in longevity, *Power Shovel* makes up for in originality. In addition, the execution is perfectly respectable, the graphics serve their purpose perfectly, and although a specific controller is available (in Japan), the controls transfer quite happily to a DualShock. Granted, those prepared to venture outside their usual diet of stale genres won't find the experience revolutionary – but they'll certainly get plenty of enjoyment from it.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Space Tripper

Format: **PC** Publisher: **www.pompom.org.uk** Developer: **PomPom** Price: **$12 (£8)** Release: **Out now**

First impressions show it as effortlessly casual, calling to mind half-finished shareware promises from across the Web: a readme file knocked up in minutes, a Web site hawking the title for just under a tenner, and a game name reminiscent of a llama-less Minter. But then the game starts, and there's nothing amateurish about it.

A bi-directional shoot-'em-up spread across four worlds and 14 levels, *Space Tripper* gives the player nothing more than a small ship, two weapons of destruction, and an increasingly obscene amount of enemies to destroy. Enemies dart and their fire comes fast, and that's where the game proves itself to be much more than a throwaway five-minute blast. The control mechanism is delicate, not twitchy, and the collision detection is accurate, not punishing. Ultimately, the game's absolutely fair; complaints about the difficulty will only come from those who fail to persevere, because each new level adheres to a near-perfect difficulty curve.

Curiously, it feels completely finished, too – which is something of a rarity in mainstream PC development, let alone the almost permanently transitive world of shareware. It's always internally consistent and utterly solid, and though that's certainly down to its simplicity, maybe that's not the point. If it's possible to downsize software to this extent and still produce something that not only entertains as much as most recent PC releases but also doesn't need an endless cycle of patches, then perhaps this isn't revamped retrogaming but a glimpse of the way things ought to be.

It's certainly a glimpse of something, if only the utopian, cliché-formed derivative vision of PC gaming of two men. There are bosses, mutations, explosions, and unstoppable interlaced laser beams, and yes, you could want for more – more levels, more weapons, more options – but that'd be a distraction from *Space Tripper's* purity. Instinctive and addictive, it's an essay in balance, a deconstruction of everything the PC's stood for over the last five years. Serious arcade gamers will have long since discarded their computers for consoles to get their twitch-gaming fix, and while this is unlikely to get them flooding back – a hardware layout of around £1,000 is an awful lot for, essentially, *Uridium* – it's certainly a step in the right direction.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten











Several of the levels have a three-dimensional structure, with lasers skidding along curves and sharp inclines. The game dynamic, however, remains resolutely 2D



Space Tripper **uses much of the 32bit colour spectrum: the existence of hues beyond the range of browns, greys, and greens that predominate in most PC gaming genres may come as a surprise to some**



Weapons selection

Space Tripper provides the player with two separate weapons – directed and spread fire – and power-ups which appear regularly throughout the game increase the intensity of whichever is currently selected. Given that enemies increase in resilience throughout the levels, it's wise to choose one of the forms of firepower at the start and concentrate on boosting it as much and as fast as possible. Destroying the four end-of-zone bosses with the red spread fire is particularly challenging, and adds a new dimension of difficulty to an already taxing game.

Kuri Kuri Mix

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Empire Interactive** Developer: **From Software** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



Critical timing

Co-operative efforts would be a touch routine without the ever-present threat of enemy intervention – such encounters are frequent, but not unfairly timed.

In the above screenshot, the left-hand character must stand on the platform in order to raise the floating stones on the right, allowing passage. Should either player be left waiting for the other to effect their part of the task, then airborne creatures will attack, creating a hindrance and chewing up precious seconds. Players must learn to synchronise their efforts, preserving the clock count and lessening the chances of enemy assaults.Think more legato than staccato gameplay.







(Right) Puzzles are not only active/passive. Here, the left-hand character must time the jump as the other player operates the rotating switch

Most multiplayer gaming resides under the 'competitive' banner, the player's goal simply to reach victory before his or her opponents. From Software has taken this premise and inverted it, instead asking the players to co-operate in order to progress, and for the most part this works well.

Kuri Kuri Mix stars two typically Japanese protagonists who travel a vertical play area on either side of the screen. To all intents and purposes the game is an isometric platformer: each character must activate doors and remove obstacles in order for the other to advance. Co-operation is the key to success – in addition to timing and memory – as the hurdles become more frequent and fiendish: blowing on a trombone in a musically themed world has an effect on a platform further along the level – failure to select the correct pitch makes the successive area harder to traverse.

The control system enables two players to either share a pad or use their own, each taking command of one character. At first, use of the in-game hints is heavy. However, the correct sequence of actions is soon consigned to memory, allowing for swift and smooth execution. And it's here that *Kuri Kuri Mix* awards the player with a deep feeling of satisfaction, each flawlessly completed level both stylish to observe and rewarding to play.

Despite this unusual balance, the oneplayer game is fiercely difficult, setting the burden of co-operative play on the shoulders of a single person. Controlling both characters while scanning both sides of the screen is nightmarish. Perhaps token inclusion, perhaps a bid to promote the twoplayer game, this mode is virtually unplayable by all but the most masochistic or determined gamer.

Thematically, there is good variation; desert, jungle, and musical worlds spread over more than 50 levels. Boss encounters are not dissimilar to the main stages by way of their puzzling layout. The first encounter requires one player to lure a giant golem into the firing line of a springloaded stake, when the other has to trip the switch. Fail to hit the target more than twice and the encounter is effectively over. A fourplayer Battle mode is included, but the title's raison d'être remains resolutely simple – work together to succeed.

In terms of depth or narrative, *Kuri Kuri Mix* is a non-entity, but for entertainment value alone it impresses and delights – an elaborate puzzler that brings two players into near-symbiotic state. Refreshing stuff.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten











(Above) Progress through each level is depicted by the two character bubbles travelling between the Start and Goal markers. Should they separate by too large a degree, the screen splits vertically via the red line, in turn limiting each player's travel. Keeping it close and tight is a must for a swift, clean victory

F-Zero: Maximum Velocity

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Nintendo** Price: **¥4,800 (£27)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Where *Super Mario Advance* is a loose reworking of *Super Mario Bros 2*, *F-Zero: Maximum Velocity* exists in the same vein, as a handheld version of the original outing. Gone are the corkscrew cylinders and multi-levelled tracks of *F-Zero X*, leaving a title that is virtually identical to the SNES original in all but name. Fortunately, the calibre of game is unchanged.

The GBA version abandons all trickery to embrace its primary objective, namely octane-fuelled racing of the fastest variety. The challenge is steep, requiring a good deal of dexterity, especially on the later tracks where bends and jumps become strategic considerations. Use of scaling tracks works well, simple futuristic environments enabling the CPU to maintain the vehicle speed, with slowdown non-existent.

Several modes exist – oneplayer, and up to fourplayer Versus. A warning, however: prolonged play can be uncomfortable as the unit is slightly too small for western hands, D-pad and buttons included.

As a launch title, this will no doubt do for GBA what the original did for SNES. Indeed, very little has changed. Those looking for a real overhaul should perhaps set their sights on GameCube.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Like its forebear, the feeling that *F-Zero: Maximum Velocity* may have been programmed with the hidden agenda of showing off its platform's 3D capabilities is hard to shake. Looks great, though





Cleverly, the game uses two Mode 7-style layers in order to achieve a sense of depth. It's not really noticeable at high speeds, but it's an ingenious touch

Wai Wai Racing

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥4,800 (£27)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**



While it's a charming game in it's own right, *Wai Wai Racing* suffers from comparisons to *Mario Kart* on the SNES. Course shortcuts and kart handling aren't as polished, resulting in a more shallow learning curve



Too many courses rely on capriciousness to provide a challenge, and all the other drivers are big cheaters, but the game is enjoyable, and graphically impressive

To compare *Wai Wai Racing* with *Super Mario Kart* on the SNES is unfair. Unfair but inevitable, given that in terms of structure, appearance, character attributes, power-ups, kart handling, and the types of track on offer, Konami's title has unashamedly modelled itself on the seminal Nintendo game.

Of course, Konami has gone some way to make the formula its own, giving it a sense of character that stands on its own merits from the moment the homepage-style interface appears. But the inclusion of characters and tracks that capitalise on the company's own intellectual property (such as *Metal Gear Solid* and *Goemon*) doesn't mask the fact that they are broadly derivative – as is the range of power-ups. The most substantial difference is the replacement of *Mario Kart*'s Battle Mode with two simpler subgames: a stopping competition and a pass-the-bomb affair.

But the simple fact is that the game is nowhere near as polished as its archetype. Although it's decent, particularly given its multiplayer mode, it doesn't offer the learning curve of its predecessor, or the finely tuned handling, and the balance between tracks, foes, and driver skill is not as delicately honed.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Top Gear: All Japan

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Kemco** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥4,800 (£27)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**





You only get two weather effects (sun or rain), and as there's no visit to the pits, don't expect these to be dynamic. Don't expect anything resembling real physics



As in real races, there are weight handicaps for those who finish the race ahead of the pack – if you win regularly, expect to have to carry in excess of 100kg around the track. It does affect the handling. A little

Generally speaking, 'realistic' racing games don't work on handhelds. Fans of *Chequered Flag* on the Atari Lynx may disagree, but in truth, it wasn't that much better from all the other mostly poor efforts.

Kemco's latest racing fest is licensed on the All Japan Grand Touring Car Championship, and as such includes both the cars and the circuits (six of them, although a track editor exists) from this competitive series. Graphically, even by GBA standards, it's not the most impressive title around. While the tracks are barely recognisable, the cars fare a little better, and at least the sense of speed is reasonably conveyed. True, the action is grindingly slow at first, but get past the first season and things soon pick up.

Still, the lag in the acceleration and braking (the latter being an exceptionally poor job) remains, the competition's skill is remarkably unimpressive (unless you're playing against three reasonably dextrous friends), the handling is amusing, and the weather is limited (and not dynamic). It's also rather easy – **Edge** powered through two seasons mostly unchallenged. *TG:AJ* has its moments, but you wouldn't want to pay a lot of yen for the experience.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

Castlevania: Circle Of The Moon

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Konami** Price: **¥4,800 (£27)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Despite the rather weak N64 incarnations, *Castlevania* is still held in high esteem by most Konami stalwarts, and it's arguable that the fourth chapter for SNES remains the pinnacle of the series. Game Boy Advance, then, presents the perfect platform for the Belmonts' return to power.

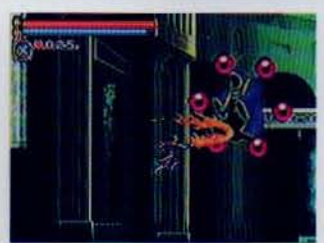
A traditional 2D platform adventure, the game mechanics are virtually identical to NES and SNES outings, retaining the whip-and-daggers combination for intuitive and nostalgic purposes. Graphically, the quality resembles Nintendo's 16bit console devoid of a few layers of parallax, but clean and crisp, nonetheless. Animation and speed are exact, and the audio is sparkling in terms of both style and sound-quality – the choral introduction is exceptional for a handheld.

RPG elements are slim, items, spells and potions collectible, while the player stats upgrade automatically as the game progresses.

There is little of note that can be considered new, and yet the balance of play is as strong as ever – Konami's original formula shines through, a mix of quality platforming, fine graphics and undeniable branding. Age has not withered the mix at all.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten





Graphics-wise, *Castlevania: Circle Of The Moon* is reminiscent of the SNES, give or take a few layers of parallax



Konami has retained the dagger and whip elements of the gameplay, which are certainly intuitive but also add a reasonable degree of nostalgia value to the title – which, it must be said, is as enjoyable as ever

Super Mario Advance

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥4,800 (£27)** Release: **Out now**

Often thought of as the black sheep of the *Mario* family, *Super Mario USA* – here in its Game Boy Advance guise – still proves to be a very compelling title. The game can seem confusing, as Mario's trademark head-stomping technique has no power among the familiar vibrant landscapes and surreal creatures. It's as if the plucky plumber has entered Bowser's kingdom only to fall asleep and dream of a stranger world where his abilities take on a new aspect.

Instead Mario can pluck at weeds in the ground to locate a variety of power-ups. Enemies can also be clutched and hurled across the screen to fell other foes, or in the case of bombs, thrown at barriers to access further levels. Destroying bosses by hurling back the very eggs they spit is great fun and tunnelling through sand, *Dig-Dug*-style, proves just as diverting.

Everything works consistently, and the opportunity to select one of four characters (Princess Toadstool, Toad, Mario, or Luigi) is worked in expertly. Collecting coins also rewards the player with an opportunity to play a slot machine sub-game for extra lives. It may not be Mario as we know him, but the Italian's first outing on GBA proves an engaging challenge.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



A great deal of versatility arises out of Mario's ability to pick up an assortment of objects. Bombs can be used to break through barriers or destroy bosses, while platforms can be stacked to access higher areas





***Super Mario Bros 2* was originally an NES game called *Doki Doki Panic*. Nintendo changed the sprites to those of the *Mario* pantheon, explaining some of the oddities**

Pinobee: Quest Of Heart

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Hudson** Developer: **Artoon** Price: **¥4,800 (£27)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**



The graphical theme of the levels changes occasionally, but sadly a lot of the action becomes overly repetitive. Still, the reward structure is good and the end result is a solid platformer for younger gamers





You start off only able to jump once (top), but meeting up with a fairy during levels allows you to expand your jumping ability. Audio isn't as advanced as the graphics

Pinobee is the tale of a robot bee created by a clever old professor. The inventor is abducted by Vector and his evil army of insects, and seeing as Pinobee was just about to have his heart fitted by the old man, the timing is rather unfortunate – so our metallic hero is left with little choice but to rescue him.

Once in the game, you can move in any direction along a beautifully rendered 2D plane using your 'flying dash' move (which increases in performance as you progress) to explore hard-to-reach spots. Along the way you encounter a fair bit of opposition, including the occasional boss. You also meet other characters seeking your help. How you react to these determines the course of the game and could prove problematic for non-Japanese speakers. You can still finish the game, but it won't necessarily be the right ending.

The game is clearly aimed at a young demographic, with the levels constructed so that the user is rarely lost, despite the size and complexity of some of the later examples – there are a few nice twists, but overall the game is repetitive. There isn't much here that will convince many older gamers to come back and complete the game properly.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Kuru Kuru Kururin

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Eighting** Price: **¥4,800 (£27)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**





The Time Challenge mode increases the pressure by penalising you for every barrier touch you suffer (top), while multiplayer races are most entertaining



Not unlike *Fantavision* at the PS2's launch back in March last year, *Kururin* is one of the few truly original launch titles to have graced the GBA's premiere line-up. Hopefully, other fresh concepts will now follow

Blended correctly, simplicity and frustration can fuel a game's addictive quality, especially where puzzle-based titles are concerned. Upset this equilibrium and the formula spoils, yet – while no *Tetris* – this isn't something *Kuru Kuru Kururin* needs to worry about. Not too much, anyway.

The premise is simple enough: using the D-pad, the player must guide a rotating stick around a series of mazes without touching the edges. An energy bar will sustain three hits, the final one being fatal. That said, there are intermittent, energy-giving heart pads included in the longer maps, where layouts require significant dexterity and patience.

Unlike *Mr Driller* or *Dynablaster*, which rely on quick reflexes for commands, Eighting's title exists in the negative, requiring the player to avoid certain actions, which is almost infinitely harder. The tension may be higher, but on occasions the enjoyment suffers inversely, leaving the player somewhat frustrated.

The resulting rich blend will not be to everyone's taste, then, but those to whom it appeals will find that *Kuru Kuru Kururin* offers a distinctly engaging diversion from the likes of *F-Zero* or *Castlevania*.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Mr Driller 2

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Namco** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥4,800 (£27)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

By far the most interesting and playable software to emerge from Namco's traditionally proficient operation in the last 12 months, *Mr Driller* arrives on Game Boy Advance in sequel form as the third iteration, *Mr Driller G*, hits the arcades.

As with its predecessor, the idea is to drill your way to the bottom of the level, avoiding falling blocks and collecting air canisters on the way so as to stop your driller man from suffocating.

Additional elements not present in the original game include deeper missions (up to 2,000m), a Tokoton mode, which enables you to alter some of the parameters (such as the difficulty level and number of air capsules), and a supremely addictive twoplayer mode via the machine's link cable.

The conversion is excellent, and although everything looks unfeasibly small at first, the game rapidly feels as though it has found its natural home on Nintendo's new console, rather than surrounded by the latest display of 3D technology usually found in the sonorous environment of your typical Japanese arcade. But far more importantly, it's still a brilliantly simple concept. And it's still brilliantly enjoyable.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten





Perfectly suited to the GBA's miniature widescreen display, *Mr Driller 2* is the current equivalent of the Game Boy's *Tetris*. Until the latter arrives, of course



Unlike some of its brethren GBA titles, non Japanese speakers should find no trouble in working out the various options offered by *Mr Driller 2* – a little trial and error, and everything is pretty straightforward

Coming together

Motorola is using its muscle to consolidate the fragmented wireless game servers market




Motorola entertainment sever manager Paul Goode


The Accompli 008 is an example of Motorola's move into producing Java-enabled, always-on GPRS devices

URL
www.motorola.com/developers/wireless


Co-operation has been a key reason for the success of the existing GSM network

While plenty of cool tech is emerging from wireless gaming, there's still a lot of scepticism from the game industry's biggest players: a fact underlined at Milia when EA stated that as far as it was concerned mobile gaming remained a hobby.

Surprisingly, Motorola's entertainment server manager, **Paul Goode**, agrees: "In our view, the market is too immature. There are too many games platforms that are not proven to be scalable or interoperatable, and the development kits and support environments are fairly laughable."

It's for this reason that Motorola has chosen not to add to developers' problems by entering the market with its own proprietary games server. Instead it has consolidated its offering with Ericsson and Siemens so developers can create for a common platform. "You can't standardise WAP around handsets given the different implementations of screen sizes and resolution," Goode explains. "But you certainly can on the server side."

In a similar way to the coming together of 3D graphics cards companies within Microsoft's DirectX program, so Motorola and its partners will be hoping that this initiative will pave the way for mobile gaming to be taken seriously. "It's expensive to agree standards," Goode concedes, "but the reason GSM [the current mobile network] is successful is because it is based on a lot of co-operation. We'll compete with Ericsson and Siemens on how we implement the games server platform and services and content, not the platform itself."

As Motorola's view of the mobile future is running content on Java-enabled devices using the always-on packet GPRS network, this is the foundation of its technology, although it will obviously support the current system of WAP over a GSM network too.

With the foundation for mobile gaming finally falling into place, Motorola's focus is moving from server technology to the creation of content. Enter the proof that Motorola is serious about wireless gaming – former Sony European development chief **Juan Montes**.



Finnish company Codeonline will look after the licensed content, Motorola will market it

"At the moment it's still small companies trying to make a name for themselves in the WAP space," says Montes, Motorola Europe's VP technology. "I think things will move now a lot faster, as we bring major brands such as 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?' and Trivial Pursuit into this space. It will be a good way for us to test how much market is there. I think it's big, but it has to be created."

Without any in-house content teams, however, Motorola is keen to spread its net as widely as possible. "We have started by creating the platform and we will definitely be a publisher, looking for talent, selecting content, creating a portfolio of that content and marketing it through our organisation," Montes explains. "We have people talking to every operator and we have people located in most of the territories we do business in. So we can discuss with operators how we will launch content into the market and how we will create a marketing campaign for the consumers in those territories."

The first fruits of this program will be big-brand launches in partnership with Finnish developer Codeonline. Codeonline brings the licensed content; Motorola will provide the marketing muscle. Other games to be released this year include a sports licence, and there is the possibility of localising some of the more western i-mode game content from Japan. "We don't want to target people who play games – 30 million people play games," Montes argues. "We want to multiply that number definitely by a factor of five, and hopefully by ten."

As for the EAs of the world, Montes thinks it won't be too long before they enter what he expects will be a rapidly maturing market. "What they are doing now is looking from the sidelines to see how it evolves. When people start to make money, they will come in, probably in the next 12-18 months," he predicts. The hobby's going to get serious soon.

CodeWarrior for phones

Motorola's standardisation also applies to development tools with Metrowerks' *CodeWarrior* suite acting as the glue holding the whole system together. Well known for its tools for consoles such as GameCube and PlayStation2, *CodeWarrior* is now also supporting the Java of mobile devices (J2ME), as well as the Symbian and Palm operating systems. Coincidentally, it's also owned by Motorola. "I wasn't going to push *CodeWarrior* as the SDK," Motorola entertainment server manager Paul Goode explains. "But actually the feedback from other companies is the SDKs is really what people are interested in."

The 3D Web

Director brings adds a new dimension to the Internet

Macromedia senior product manager Miriam Geller (right); Intel Architecture Labs strategic marketing manager Rick Benoit (far right)















One of the most effective demos was a simple ball-controlling Mac game from Nonocle (above). [illegible] also shown in non-interactive form (top)

URL
www.macromedia.com/uk

Bandwidth and the limitations of browsers are the main barriers which must be overcome before the Web can move from its current flat status into glorious 3D. "There are over 50 companies trying to bring 3D content to the Web in a pervasive manner," says Macromedia's senior product manager, *Director* and *Shockwave Player*, **Miriam Geller**. "But right now there is little 3D available. With the release of *Director 8.5* and the *Shockwave 3D* engine in May, we believe we'll be providing a new type of experience for users."

Macromedia's focus on 3D was first noted with its announcement of the w3d file format. This enables developers to output models created in industry-standard packages such as *3DS Max* and *Maya* directly into *Director*. Deploying such memory-intensive content across the web requires some clever compression technology, however.

This has been provided by Intel's Architecture Labs. "It is difficult to bring 3D to the Web because of the complexity of the content that you are trying to stream, as well as the uncertainty of the processor you can tap into at the end-user level," explains **Rick Benoit**, the Labs' strategic marketing manager.

Intel has focused on sending the smallest amount of information possible over the Internet, as *Shockwave 3D* is designed to be a narrowband technology. One early 3D technology demo weighed in at 30Mb as a *QuickTime* file, but only 500K using *Shockwave 3D* – a compression ratio of 60:1. "We know broadband is coming, but it's not a readily accepted transmission at this time," Benoit points out.



Touted French developer Kalisto showed its GT viewer demo, which enables users to replay races from multiple angles – anything from helicopter topdown to driver's viewpoint

The main reason for this is that *Shockwave 3D* relies on the power of the end-user's machine, whether it be a PC or a Mac, to reconstruct the streamed content and increase its quality according to the processing power available. Key is the implementation of multi-resolution meshes and subdivisional surfaces. The latter enables developers to create low-poly models and then stream the model data with appropriate algorithms allowing the receiving CPU and graphics card combination to ramp up the number of polygons.

Conversely the mesh technology lets developers to create high-poly models, which combined with an instruction set, allow for the level of detail downgrading of models. "This is a great tool for the developers," says Benoit. "I can create content one time, render it for multiple different platforms whether a P2 or P4, and regardless of the bandwidth available the user still has a high-quality experience."

In a similar way, character animation is supported with a character's skeleton, the data points that make up the skeleton, and the movement of those data points all being streamed to the end-user's processor for reanimation.

Other effects supported include non-realistic rendering, so models can easily re-rendered with a flat cel-shaded look, as well as basic particle effects such as fog and smoke. Realistic physics is provided by a cut-down version of Irish middleware provider Havok's rigid body dynamics code.

The end-user experience will be dependent both on a user's bandwidth as well as the power of the machine they are using. Minimum specifications have yet to be confirmed, but it's expected to be in the order of a 300MHz processor and a 56K modem. *Shockwave 3D* doesn't require 3D hardware, it can run in software, but it will use hardware if it is available. And as it supports DirectX 7 as well as OpenGL and DirectX 5.2, the engine even supports hardware T&L functions.

And with the current install base of *Shockwave* standing at 200 million, with 250,000 users downloading it daily, there should be a ready market available for interactive 3D content. And even though users will have to upgrade their *Shockwave* players to access 3D content, the player's auto-update facility makes this operation as painless as possible.

More multiplayer

First introduced in the previous iteration of *Shockwave*, *Director 8.5* utilises an upgraded version of Multiuser Server for realtime multiplayer online gaming. Version 3.0 now supports 2,000 simultaneous users, up from the previous total of 1,000. Another big improvement has been the adoption of the UDP protocol, in addition to the standard TCP stack. Server-side scripting has also been implemented to deal with administrative tasks such as logins, mid-game exits, and security issues.

Immersive graphics

NDL's *NetImmerse* engine is lowering technology risk, enabling developers to focus on gameplay





NDL president John Austin (right); NDL technical staffer Lars W Bishop (far right)







At GDC, NDL showed off the new bump-mapping support of *NetImmerse* [illegible]

URL
www.ndl.com

Founded by Turner Whitted, the inventor of ray tracing, it took rendering software specialist Numerical Design Ltd (NDL) 14 years to get properly into the games industry. It released the first version of its *NetImmerse* engine into the nascent middleware market of 1997.

Today, with off-the-shelf 3D engines two-a-penny, *NetImmerse* is one of the lower-profile offerings, but with more than 30 titles using its technology, NDL's reputation is certainly on the rise.

"Obviously our flagship title is *Munch's Oddysee*," **John Austin**, NDL's president, explains proudly. And with good reason: if one of the selling points of middleware is the reduction of technology risk, then Oddworld Inhabitants' dramatic platform jump from PlayStation2 to XBox is a textbook example of the benefits. "One of the reasons they were able to make the switch so quickly and successfully was the game was built on top of an engine that was on both platforms, so they didn't have to rip out a bunch of platform-specific code," says Austin.

Another client taking advantage of *NetImmerse*'s cross-platform abilities is Henk Rogers' Blue Planet Software. The holder of the *Tetris* licence is the first company to sign up for all four versions of *NetImmerse* as it prepares to bring the elegance of falling blocks to PC, PlayStation2, XBox, and GameCube. Other developers using the technology include Irrational Games' *Freedom Force*, Totally Games' *Star Trek Bridge Commander*, and Deep Red's 'Thunderbirds' game. At present, though, most of these are only developing for single platforms.

"The developers using our engine break down into two camps," says Austin. "One is a set of people like Totally Games. They could have written an engine as good as ours, but they want to buy in an engine and focus on the content, development, and gameplay. There are a lot of things like keeping up with all the new hardware, DirectX, support and documentation that they don't want to do. Oddworld is primarily an artist-driven company for example. They have made a lot of 2D games, so *NetImmerse* was their way to lever into the 3D world."



Irrational Games' title *Freedom Force* relies on NDL's technical expertise, freeing the team to concentrate on the colour of its heroes' pants



But *NetImmerse* is not just a C++ 3D rendering engine. According to Austin, one of its key differentials is the way it integrates into the workflow of game artists. Its plug-in for *3DS Max*, *MAXImmerse*, enables artists to preview their content and animations in-game without the invention of programmers – capabilities that have also been expanded to *Maya* and *Multigen Creator* in its most recent release. Other improvements to *NetImmerse 4.0* include full support for DirectX 8's pixel and vertex shaders, and NVidia's new bump-mapping effects.

Play the way you're facing

The current trend for middleware vendors to offer more than 3D rendering capabilities – witness LithTech's networking and Criterion's *RenderWare* platform – isn't something that attracts NDL.

"We feel we are 3D experts, not physics experts," says **Lars W Bishop**, a member of NDL's technical staff. "We'd rather allow customers to go to MathEngine or to Havok rather than lock them down to a specific solution. We still see a lot of people in the range where they do want to write their own physics engine because they want to do something simple."

Ironically, the original version of *NetImmerse* did include networking code: hence the name. Every customer wanted a different networking solution, however, so the code was removed but the name remained.

"If you have a well-laid-out engine architecture, it's a case of having some new code that says: 'Okay, what is the message telling me and where do we ship it in the scene graph?'" explains Bishop concerning integration with other middleware code. "I think we have had good success working with the likes of Havok and Proksim, and that's allowed people to sleep better at night. And because we sell them the full source code, they can see there's nothing to fear."



Lorne Lanning's Oddworld team made the transition from PlayStation2 to XBox look easy, thanks in no small part to the cross-platform ability of the *NetImmerse* engine

Java gets serious

Sun drives convergent games onwards with its developer-based initiative to create a *Java* gaming API



Sun business development manager Chris Melissinos





Although it is not realtime online game, *RoboForge* (above) demonstrates the quality that can be expected from *Java* games

There are two catchphrases that underpin Sun Microsystems' thinking: 'The computer is the network', and its *Java* mantra, 'Write once, run everywhere'. Predictably Sun's initiative to leverage *Java* into the gaming space is characterised by both approaches.

"Rather than looking at the Web as a delivery mechanism, we look at it as a platform," says **Chris Melissinos**, Sun's business development manager for *Java* gaming. "We think the Web can provide a terrific avenue to traffic data between devices that allow people to exist inside a game framework. For example, if I am playing *Phantasy Star Online*, what happens when I sit down to play? I'm tethered to that device, but the things I enjoy about the game aren't necessarily just playing the game, it's the characters, the storyline. So, take the components that are not bound to a piece of hardware and put them on a portable device. If I am playing 20 hours a week and the developers are charging me $10 a month, give me the ability to take it with me and charge me $5 more."

It's *Java*'s cross-platform pedigree which gives it the potential to be leveraged onto everything from phones to online consoles. "Rather than your game residing on one box, with *Java* it might reside on five," Melissinos predicts. "A developer could then have a couple of feature sets that specifically map down into the cellphone or the PDA space because they are all *Java*-based. Our aim is to give the developer the most reach they can to get their games to market and give the consumer the most amount of choice to determine where they want to play them."

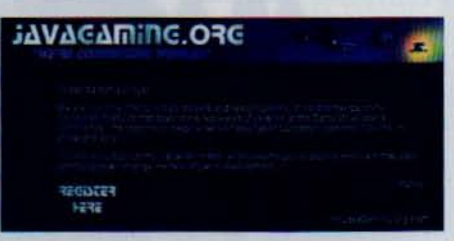


The heart of Sun's initiative will be the javagaming.org Web site, which was scheduled to go live at the start of April

It's this kind of convergent thinking that has driven Sun to start up a community-based open-source group to drive the use of *Java* in gaming. Drawing on the experience gained from its *3D Java* program, the initial batch of signed up developers that include Cheshire-based Friendly Giants, Liquid Edge games, EA.com, MathEngine, Tao Systems, and Sony Online. GameSpy Industries will provide multiplayer expertise, and Sun is keen to encourage interested parties to register on its new javagaming.org Web site.

"We are looking at how *Java* is being implemented by game developers and saying: 'We are obviously not a videogames company, nor are we going to be making videogames'. So we have approached a group of industry experts and they have decided to collaborate on building game APIs for *Java* and help to create the de facto standard for game development," Melissinos says.





One of the first games to highlight the concept of pervasive *Java* gaming is Anim-X's *Majestic*, which is currently in the process of going live on EA.com. "Its entire backend platform is *Java* – a Java Enterprise server, JavaBeans, Java Servlets, and JavaServer pages – and the reason they chose it is it gave them a stable platform across multiple devices so they can get on as many devices as possible," explains Melissinos. "That's the only way a game like *Majestic* will work. *Java* provides the framework and the Web provides the platform."



URL

http://javagaming.org
http://java.sun.com/products/java-media/3D
www.roboforge.com



EA's big online hope, the Anim-X-developed *Majestic* relies on a *Java* backend to leverage its compelling conspiracy atmosphere across the Web

Java-enabled Robot Wars

One of the neatest examples of Java implementation on Sun's stand at GDC came from Liquid Edge Games. Its *RoboForge* game is currently completing beta testing for a Q2 release. A 3D bot-combat game, players construct their robots and design the AI offline before uploading them to the central server. The preprogrammed warriors then fight it out, with the results and battle footage being posted back on the server.

RoboForge relies on *Java 2* (including *Java 3D*) for its cross-platform ability, with support for Linux, Solaris and other UNIX variants expected soon. Sadly, Macs are not yet supported as Apple has yet to port the relevant Java libraries. The minimum machine specification is a P200 with 64Mb of RAM and an 8Mb 3D card.

Diary of a videogame

Brain In A Jar battles on, fitting out new offices and enhancing its racing engine

Brain In A Jar diary, part five
by managing director Matthew Gabriel



Still no development deal to talk about. It is looking like publishers are starting to spend money again, as we have had a number of publishers call us back from meetings we had with them months ago – so things are looking up. We are, of course, still talking to a few publishers about specific products, but nothing that can be talked about yet.

We continue to keep ourselves busy and keep the company going, but it is getting frustrating as all we want to do is start development on a new game that we can call our own. It seems so long ago now since we had the nice feeling you get when you start designing a new game. We are still keeping an eye on what's happening with Ferrari, but again there is nothing major to report, other than their two great F1 victories so far. Did you get up in the middle of the night to watch? Oli, one of the company owners and our technical director, has made the trip to Malaysia to watch the Grand Prix. I can't say any more because I'm too jealous.

The good news is that our new offices are very nearly ready. We should be moving in next month. We had searched high and low for suitable offices, and found a barn on the Oulton Park estate, literally 200 metres from Oulton Park race circuit (close to where some of us live). After discussions with the estate management company it was agreed that the barn would be converted into an office for us. As such, we have been able to get involved with the design from the start. The office looks out on fields from every side, and the only sounds are farm animals, birds, and racecars. It's perfect for us, as this should create the right environment for the creation of racing games. We will, once we move in, spend time getting to know the people at the race track, so hopefully we will be able to consult with professional racing people about some of the more technical issues. As much as we have learned, there is still much more to discover about the inner workings of race cars and motorsport.

"It's looking like publishers are starting to spend money again, as we have had a number call us back from meetings we had months ago – things are looking up"

Deciding on colour schemes and carpets is harder, and causes more arguments than designing and developing a game. It's quite incredible, but we have now chosen and agreed on everything. It sounds silly, but this is where you spend a lot of your time, even competing with your house for the majority of your waking time. It can make so much difference to 'work efficiency' if you feel comfortable and happy in your surroundings. That's why we spent a lot of time trying to get it right, choosing the style and – most importantly – the lighting. You need to create a warm atmosphere, but have to be very careful with the choice of light colour, as hints of colours other than white, typically used for houses, can affect the artists. No, it doesn't send them mad – they don't need any help in that department – it just gives them problems with colour balancing. There are no overhead fluorescent lights.

We have also managed to send two of our staff to GDC this year. Most of the team have always wanted to go, and few of them have ever been before. As we have been wrapped up obtaining the Ferrari licence, losing it, and then concentrating on keeping the company alive, we feel that we have been out of the development scene for a while now. The reason behind sending two people along is to get up to speed on the latest developments, and get ideas for future technologies. It's been some time since we designed the first Ferrari game, and we need to keep an eye on what's happening. The industry moves so fast nowadays. It's quite difficult for a small company to keep abreast of everything. We have sent Pig and Chris along, covering the design and programming tracks in detail, but between them they should be able to catch most of the art-related information. I'll let you know whether it was worth sending people next time I write. It seems like GDC is much more of a working conference than say E3 or ECTS. As important as E3 is, I'm not sure how much impact it has on development methods. It is, however, great for developing crippling hangovers.

We are also showing a demo of our racing engine at GDC. As I have probably mentioned before, we have a good relationship with Dolby through Rik Ede. We did a lot of work with Dolby on one of our previous games, and we have joined up with them and Rik's company, Gamesound, to produce a Dolby Digital version of our racing engine. Everyone will have returned by the time you read this, so I won't remind you to go and see it – I hope that those of you that did enjoyed it. It makes an awful lot of difference to have 5.1 channel audio, especially with the right speaker set-up. We have been convinced about DVD and Dolby Digital for a long time now, and it seems as though everyone is at last starting to develop for it. The speaker and soundcard systems are now very good, certainly better than the majority of games require. Take a look at the new systems from Creative.

Well, that's all for now. As usual, I hope there will be something to celebrate soon, and I hope all of you are doing well.



Company stalwarts Pig and Chris took the company's racing engine to GDC



The main worry of late at Brain Towers has been what colour to paint the walls

1000

The making of...

The Way Of The Exploding Fist

Edge learns just how differently they do things in Australia, as Gregg Barnett of Beam Software relates the sun, sea, and sex-stuffed story that lies behind the genesis of a seminal martial arts videogame

Format: **Commodore 64/various**
Publisher: **Melbourne House**
Developer: **Beam Software**
Origin: **Australia**
Original release date: **1985**



The Way Of The Exploding Fist embodied everything which is sacred to the martial arts fraternity – elegance, control, precision. It eschewed the scrolling scenery and endless procession of enemies more typical of early fighting games such as *Kung Fu Master* and attempted something radical: a one-on-one contest boasting an audacious array of fighting moves. Though *Karate Champ* was to appear during the game's development, *Exploding Fist*'s concentration on simulation and a dynamic block/counter attack mechanic set it apart from anything else which had gone before.

The title came from fledgling Australian developer Beam Software and was tailored for the UK market by its publishing wing, Melbourne House. The locale which provided the resources to make the title was a far cry from the tranquil backdrops which were to typify the game's eastern flavour. As the game's creator, **Gregg Barnett** explains: "South Melbourne was not only the computer centre of Melbourne, if not Australia, but it was the red-light area with scores of brothels… so, literally, we had a brothel on one side, one on the other, and then one across the street. I don't know if any of our guys used them, but they knew all the girls quite well because they'd share tram rides and they'd be stood outside showing clients in. Mind you, another

distraction was the topless beach."

Diversions aside, Barnett was intent on making *Exploding Fist* an incredibly realistic interpretation of a martial arts discipline. The 18 moves of the game provided the focus for the initial outline. "As with a lot of my designs it started with the user interface," begins Barnett. "For *Exploding Fist* I spent a lot of time with an old joystick, mapping imaginary moves on to it. It had to be intuitive so a manual wasn't a requirement. We had pull down for duck and punch low, push up for jump, pull back to retreat (or block if being attacked). It was this procedure that determined which moves were in and which weren't. Then research was done on the moves – films and martial arts books – to give us a consistent style for the artist to work with."

Bruce Lee's popularity and lots of little hand movements to protect their breasts. But then when he went to Hollywood he exaggerated and he used The Exploding Fist – a style in which the fighter would keep his body loose and then like a Japanese karate fighter he'd tense it at the last second."

Lee's infamous one-inch punch encapsulated the spirit of the game. Bouts between two masters would often follow a pattern of waiting and blocking until openings formed. A quick strike with the all-powerful roundhouse kick could win the match if timed to perfection. "It worked graphically as well," adds Barnett. "Because you could have a great impact where you had everything loose, and then you'd swing everything out and at the last second the artist would tighten the fist and that would be the impact

(half English, half Pascal), before coding all the routines in assembler. In fact, the first compile wasn't even attempted until I had everything for the twoplayer game ready. In one day I went from nothing happening to a full twoplayer game (much to the relief of one or two people). That very day I remember returning to my desk from a coffee break to find a queue of people playing *Exploding Fist*, at which point I knew we were on to something big."

Taking the handwritten data and then transferring it into living breathing code was not only a tedious process but relied heavily upon the reliability of existing technology. "In terms of coding, in those days I engineered every facet of the development cycle," adds Barnett. "The main reason for this was the old assemblers we had to use. They would take hours for full



There were only four backgrounds in *Exploding Fist*, but their minimalist beauty gave the game its distinctive eastern flavour. The format was copied for many years





The Way Of The Exploding Fist embodied everything which remains sacred to the martial arts fraternity – elegance, control, precision

distinctive fighting style supplied much of the inspiration. Barnett sought out every book in the district to provide a focus for his vision. But, interestingly, the game's focus on power and aggression was tempered with a feminine touch. "*Exploding Fist* combined Bruce Lee's Wing Chun style which was actually started as a female style of martial arts," explains Barnett. "Originally it was developed so that nuns could protect themselves with

point. With the collision detection that I opted to use, the hit was always accurate."

Barnett's perfectionism went to extraordinary lengths. With research already well underway he began to develop the game – by writing all the code down, line by line, in longhand. This process took approximately two months. "Then I started with a tree diagram linking all the subroutines, not just main modules," he explains. "I would then create pseudo code

compiles, so you had to get them right. A classic example was just before *Exploding Fist*, when I was finishing off *Horace Goes Skiing*. It was the last race for the America's Cup, the year Australia first won it from them. I was intending to work all night, but started a full compile anyway. I went home and watched the race (over four hours), came back and the compile was only halfway through."

The game's most exquisite feature was its pixel-perfect collision detection. Barnett created his own editor to achieve the accuracy he desired. This plotted every impact animation frame for frame, rather than the standard collision-box approach. The collision routines coupled with the sound effects resulted in an incredibly satisfying reward when blows landed. The addition of more pronounced crunch effects for perfectly timed hits made the game particularly tactile, and remained the benchmark for fighting games for many years.

The sprite animation and sound effects are also fondly remembered 16 years on. For Barnett these are the two technical aspects of which he is particularly proud: "The more innovative things were the sprite meshes (Commodore 64) and the digitised screams and shouts. Both of these I actually delegated internally. We went on to far bigger and better things with C64 sprites, but at the time *Exploding Fist* was

















some people preferred to take the easy route through the oneplayer mode. "They could get good at the leg sweep for the first seven or eight opponents if they were that sort of boring person – just pressing and pressing and pressing. In the Spectrum version we fixed that problem, but on the Commodore version if people wanted to be really anal about it they could leg sweep their way through. Although when they got to the last couple of opponents they then find that they have real trouble because the last two would just jump the attack."

Though the title is often remembered for its cathartic pleasures, for developer Beam Software, the game's inherent exuberance threatened to bring out the child to an alarming degree. Mix a hi-octane Jackie Chan movie with a scene from 'A Shot In The Dark',

the best utilisation of them. As for the sampled sound, it was a huge part of the game's success. The pre-attack wind-up screams and the bone-crunching impacts were something new in those days. Even the scream during loading is still remembered today. The number of people who have mentioned how they jumped the first time they heard that is quite amazing."

With the twoplayer mode already in place, Barnett began implementing the AI to ensure that a solid oneplayer experience flourished: "I remember spending two weeks or so analysing how people played the game. From that information I created a list of AI variables: aggression, defensiveness, speed, ability to block or counterattack, favourite moves, sequences, and learning. I quickly created a perfect opponent with high marks in all these attributes. I then deteriorated the attributes to give me the lesser opponents. In other words I started with the best opponent and just worked backwards from there."

The formula worked tremendously well – with one slight oversight. "I always regretted the leg sweep," laments Barnett. "Because I made this simulation and I made it very accurate and, of course, in real life the leg sweep is very powerful at knocking your opponent down. It doesn't do much damage other than that. Initially I had a layer of moves where once you were collapsed on the ground you could still keep fighting – they never made it through. But the leg sweep was still in there. It was such a wide move with the legs going out three or four feet. So there's all that distance and unless your opponent jumps you're going to hit them. I kept it accurate, which was a mistake."

Unfortunately, *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* devotees soon discovered the crippling power of the leg sweep and news that the game could almost be completed with just one technique was reported in the gaming press. While this never detracted from the twoplayer experience, Barnett certainly bemoans the fact that and an approximation of the office atmosphere during voice sampling might be conjured up. Inspector Clouseau stalking a recalcitrant Kato couldn't have caused more of a disturbance among the whorehouses of South Melbourne. "Recording those screams was a decidedly weird experience," concludes Barnett. "We were jumping around like madmen from a kung fu movie and screaming our lungs out, even getting the odd complaint from neighbours. Ironically, *The Times* did an article on *Exploding Fist*, saying how games were growing up and mature names like *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* proved it. Not exactly what I had in mind at the time…"



reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 34, July 1996

When it comes to putting together an **Edge** cover, it's usually either a relentlessly tricky process or a piece of cake. In **E**34's case, it was the former: Nintendo did not supply any official artwork, so the art editor took a screenshot from *Super Mario 64* and applied various Photoshop filters to it. Two days of debate ensued: editorial types preferred a simple, jumbo-pixellated version; the art team and publisher a pyramidal-style treatment. You can see whose version won out.

Inside the magazine, Nintendo's showing at E3 dominated news, with breathless hands-on reports covering *PilotWings 64*, *WaveRace 64* and *Super Mario 64*. To coin an Americanism, Nintendo *owned* E3.

A feature ruminating over Microsoft's determined entry into the game space, meanwhile, contained a number of interesting soundbites from **Bill Gates**, notably "I think it's tough for somebody to come in with a new platform at this point," "I think it's pretty tough [to launch a machine between £400 and £1,000]." and "[in terms of reaching older gamers] Until you really get the Internet, where there are other people and an element of socialisation, I think it's pretty hard to pull the adults in."

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"There's this notion that you can sort of rip off Japanese companies and – no really, I mean, that's sort of the 3DO model."
Bill Gates attempts to sum up Trip Hawkins' failure in the east.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
'Win a Vauxhall Corsa worth £7,750'
Edge gets into promo mode with Gremlin Interactive

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)
Thor: The Elemental King Lore (Saturn; 6/10), *Jumping Flash 2* (PlayStation; 7/10), *International Track & Field* (PlayStation; 8/10), *Bust A Move 2* (PlayStation; 8/10), *Vampire: The Night Warriors* (PlayStation; 7/10), *The Settlers 2* (PC; 8/10)


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1. Nintendo/Paradigm's *PilotWings 64*... 2. ... which helped the big N steal the attentions and hearts of E3 attendees 3. Computer Artworks' William Latham gets reflective 4. The only interview with William Henry Gates III to ever appear in **Edge** 5. The first *Metal Slug* arrives in coin-op form 6. Ancient's *Thor*, a game which hardly pushed its host machine's potential

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, *TOCA: WTC* Team producer **Gavin Raeburn** recalls coin-op classic *Robotron*





Robotron's unalloyed arcade appeal encouraged Raeburn to leave his gran out in the cold

There are many, many games that drew me into producing games, and many, many more that have kept me in the business for so long. Picking one, I'd probably choose the original *Robotron*.

I remember playing this as a young lad at Noda Taxi's up in Newcastle, with my gran stood outside in the cold having a ciggie or two. I can think of no other game that has given me such a pure and intense gaming buzz from just one credit.

For me, it's everything an arcade game should be – no patterns to learn as such, just wave after wave of manic robots (blobs of red pixels) spitting shit at you while you chase round trying to save the innocent humans (blobs of blue-coloured pixels).

It's one of those games where a simple fight-or-flight reaction takes over, your peripheral vision dies, and your whole vision focuses on just your character pegging it around the screen. Fucking marvellous! Oh, and it was only 10p a shot. Yes, I'm that old.

Anyway, pick up the *Williams Arcade Pack* for PlayStation with *Robotron* on it if you see it anywhere. You won't regret it.

FAQ

Glenn Corpes

Co-founder, Lost Toys Games



Glenn Corpes, one of the most gifted coders working in the game industry, actually started out producing graphics. Now hard at work on Lost Toys' next title, he took time out to give his As to **Edge**'s Qs.

What was the first videogame you played?
I remember an eight-way-scrolling driving game, viewed from above, your car was a Beetle with a yellow tinted circle above it, the road was marked by dots, hint arrows, and little patches of oil with 'oil' written on them. I'd love to know what this was called so I can look for the ROM for MAME.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
Games machine: an orange Binatone thing with four games; I found it in my dad's garage the other day and it still works. Computer: a ZX81, bought from the very first ad in January '81

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
I was playing around with moving blobs around the screen with cursors on the school Commodore Pets in late 1980.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
I got a job as an artist as Bullfrog were starting out; they didn't need programmers (they had two). I did this for a year or so and started programming again on what became *Populous*, which was also the last game I did the graphics for. My first original design would probably be the graphics and levels for *Fusion*.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
Dungeon Master on the Atari ST. I love the way that most of the screen was used for that wonderful display while the surrounding stuff is so minimalist. Every RPG after that seemed to have the graphical style of the game puking out of the view and all over the user interface.

What was the last game you played, and what did you think of it?
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 on Dreamcast was very cool, but I'm not sure that the enhancements actually make it better than the original – and it's so much harder. A lot of that could just be that the PlayStation DualShock is so much better than a DC pad, I suppose.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
Less than I did, maybe less than I should – probably five or six, but only if I include the game I'm working on and diversions like Java maze puzzles and Palm games.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
Arcades seem to be full of just a few genres these days. I prefer seaside arcades where I might find an old *Powerdrift* machine, the best arcade driving game ever.

What's your favourite book, album, and film of all time?
Book: Neil Gaiman's 'Sandman' series. If I had to pick one, 'Doll's House'. Album: '100 Flowers Bloom', the Gang Of Four compilation. Film: I'd rather watch episodes of 'The Prisoner'.

Of all the games you've been involved with, what's your favourite, and why?
Populous, because I was responsible for so much of it: the graphics, the graphic engine, the landscape generation, the UI, everything except the actual logic of the game. It's the only game I've ever worked on where I opened the final boxed copy, stuck it in the drive, and spent a solid week playing the singleplayer game.

"Arcades seem to be full of just a few genres. I prefer seaside arcades where I might find an old *Powerdrift*, the best arcade driving game ever"

What are you working on at the moment?
The graphic engine and bits of the design of Lost Toys' next game.

What stage is it at?
Very advanced, considering that we haven't decided on the publisher yet. The game is already playable and visually unique, and we're putting a lot of effort into creating characters and plot. Before we have been a little purist – 'game mechanics are all that matter' – but this time we are planning everything upfront and the whole thing ties together much better.

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
The shoot 'em up brought out of retirement. FPSs and arcade games with guns on strings are all very cool, but aren't what I'm talking about.

What annoys you about the industry?
Big publishers being scared of risk while dominating the industry. I'd love to see it evolve into something more like the music industry and less like film, something where gamers are into various genres and small developers who want to do something really unique can make a living.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
Working with people who really care about what they are doing. Being around people striving to innovate or find the best solution to a problem is very rewarding. It kind of makes you wonder why some big businesses seem to strive to beat this out of their workers.

Whose work do you most admire?
Gameplay: Miyamoto – *Super Mario World* alone would be enough. Tech: John Carmack – ahead of the pack on graphics and multiplayer.

What new platform are you most looking forward to?
As a gameplayer with two small children: GameCube. As a developer who would like a little freedom and a platform not sewn up by a few huge games: XBox.

What's your take on mobile phone gaming?
I've been carrying a Palm around since the first Pilot, and think it's great for a certain kind of game. Because of this I've considered the first teetering steps of WAP to be somewhat irrelevant and haven't been watching as closely as I could have been. I'm hoping these will converge in a future generation of phones.

inbox

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Something struck me the other day while playing Nintendo's latest masterpiece, *Zelda: Majora's Mask*. I have been a fan of Nintendo's games right back since to the days of *Super Mario Bros* on the NES, and have often wondered how they produce such startlingly good games. While thinking about this the one thing I kept coming back to is how simple Nintendo games are.

In this age of highly complex games with a multitude of complex controls and features, Nintendo continues to make games that feature simple mechanics and ideas that have been realised in full. If you look objectively at any Nintendo game, you see that it features simple concepts and abilities – from Mario being able to throw fireballs in the first *Super Mario Bros*, to the different suits in *SMB3*, and on to the structure of collecting stars in *Mario 64*. But whereas other gamemakers use abilities and items as 'keys' that solve a puzzle or access a new area, Nintendo makes these abilities an integral part of the game that can be used in many different ways and in many different circumstances.

You can almost imagine the engineers at NCL scrutinising each new idea and extracting as many gameplay possibilities as possible from it. This is reflected in the coherent game structure, where playful exploration of these abilities is encouraged and duly rewarded. The real beauty of these games, therefore, comes through the complexity that is built from layering these seemingly simple, well-executed set of ideas.

Zelda perhaps represents the current pinnacle of this idea; with its numerous quests and items, each one on its own quite simple, but when combined and integrated weave into a rich tapestry which produces perhaps one of the greatest games currently available.

I am not for a minute suggesting that this is the only reason that Nintendo's games are so good but I think it is a point game developers should consider before developing their next over-complicated, bloated game.

Robert Hardie, via email

It is definitely odd that thousands of developers share your passion for Nintendo games but continue to piece together their own drivel and then expect it to earn them a healthy crust.

Part of the problem, of course, is that devcos have been working with moving targets in recent years (few were prepared for the intricacies of the final PS2 silicon, for example), and it's difficult enough coordinating a team of 15+ people, whose combined efforts today's game's demand, without having to worry about a stable box on which your project must run. And, as some of this month's Game Boy Advance titles prove, it's easier to experiment in an environment whose boundaries are, by nature, both limited and limiting.

This is no excuse for creative bankruptcy, however. Perhaps more developers should think about *why* NCL's games are so often fun as well as simply enjoying the delights they offer.

I can't help wondering exactly why people believe the N64 control pad is the best. They would probably say it is because of its innovative analogue control. In what way is that an innovation? I can remember a friend who had an analogue controller for his BBC, years before Mario ever set foot inside a console (Game & Watch *Donkey Kong* excluded). Even if it is revolutionary, and perfectly suited for *Mario 64* and similar games, it is also fair to say that it seems to be solely designed for *Mario*. For anything else, it is useless.

A good example would be a football title. You want to shoot for goal, but first you must glance at the pad in order to remember where the right button is. Oh yes, there it is; placed illogically on the pad's surface. Now, DualShock gives you the best of both worlds. It takes what is good about Nintendo's effort and then goes on to provide a pad that is ergonomically perfect. It becomes invisible when placed into your hands and works wonderfully, regardless of game genre. I know Sony's controller is best; Nintendo (judging by GameCube's controller) seems to agree. So why doesn't everybody else?

Robin Whitbread, via email

You say potato, we say potato. If you will.

After Miyamoto claimed the GameCube controller had taken a year to design, I was expecting something special. But when the first GameCube pictures appeared, other than its undeniably brilliant button configuration, it hardly seemed like the result of a year's work by a visionary. Although I had no doubts about the controller's ergonomics, there was nothing there that hadn't already been seen on a home console. However, after a little consideration, I believe it is the triumph of design I was hoping for.

Looking at some the most popular games on the market – *Tomb Raider*, *FIFA*, *ISS* – which of these utilise even one analogue stick fully? An analogue stick offers 360-degree directional control, and then a choice of speed to move in the direction chosen. Even *Gran Turismo*, with one of the most celebrated control systems featured in a game, doesn't really require a stick for steering.



Robert Hardie believes Nintendo's secret of success lies with keeping things simple, as is evident in the likes of *Super Mario 64* (despite its 3D visuals)





Andrew Oyston is livid about Nintendo's plans to release GameCube first in the US and Japan, with the UK launch pencilled for in for 2002

Moving left and right could be just as effectively done using two analogue buttons to move left and right. The most effective use of an analogue stick to date is still *Mario 64*. So, if so few developers can design software to use even one analogue stick fully, what would have been the point in the GameCube controller offering something groundbreaking or even outlandish, when current technology has not been mastered?

It follows what has already been said about the GameCube: it will be a developer-friendly platform, and its controller is a reflection of that. The design is not selfishly motivated as the N64's controller was, instead it was designed according to what would be best for developers as a whole.

Ashutosh Chhibbar, via email

Eh? Imagine playing *GoldenEye* using a D-pad to aim. It would be like typing wearing boxing gloves.

Having just read the letters section of **E**95, I noticed a letter from Alex Winn. He has the opinion that the XBox is nothing more than an expensive DVD player. But what would you call the PS2?

I think that all PS2 owners should be worried about the fate of their so-called 'dream machine', as there is a very uncertain future for the console. With depressing sales in Japan and already a PS3 confirmed, it makes you wonder if Sony really have gone wrong with this console.

Microsoft know that they can come into the market and make a real success with their console, as every software company is working for them apart from Nintendo. They cannot possibly fail to deliver hundreds of quality games, and the games will truly make the system great.

With the XBox offering DVD and broadband, it is a much superior system to the PS2, what with its four USB control ports and its rigorously tried-and-tested controllers. So, you cannot really call the XBox an expensive DVD player (as we do not know the price as of yet), but we can rest assured that Microsoft will produce a machine of great power and build quality, unlike Sony's console, which is still suffering from build quality problems. The list of PSone games that wont work on the so-called backwards-compatible machine is also growing.

I can't wait to see what the future brings to the gaming world, with amazing machines to come. So what does the future hold?

Chris Love, via email

One of the biggest eye-openers this month was definitely using XBox controllers to actually play games (previously **Edge** had witnessed them not plugged into working hardware) and discovering their practicality (D-pad aside). Perhaps Microsoft has got a chance in this business, after all...

I have just read about the 'concrete' launch date for the GameCube in Europe, and while disappointed at the wait, I am also angry at the news. Surely Nintendo and others are aware that, as a territory, Europe has now the largest number of gamers. Why then, has the Big N decided to leave Europe solely to Sony for another year?

If the machine is ready for Japan and America for the autumn, why not us? Are the lessons of the N64 not yet learned? Or do they think they cannot keep up with demand? For if they wait, there may not be much of a market left. As long as Sony are on their own, the casual gaming public will look at its machine first. Okay, the games are poor (especially compared with the Dreamcast), and with the exception of *MGS2*, not much appeals, unless you like F1 games, anything from 3DO, or more samey sequels. I make this plea to the newly formed Nintendo divisions of Europe. Please, try to get the GameCube out sooner.

If the games are good (which is a bit like asking if the Pope is Catholic), then I'll buy one, but I, like many others, would like to buy one sooner, rather than later. There is one more point I'd like to make: Who in their right mind picked the post-Christmas period? Unless they mean Easter, in which case maybe someone should ask THE Games if they want their old job back...

Andrew Oyston, via email

Here are a couple suggestions for Sega. Especially now that they seem to be dropping online gaming support – re: the lack of online support for *Daytona 2001* – why don't they take a slightly different tack and try an open up the online gaming on the DC in a more PC type of way?

1. Release the US version of the browser software in the UK, so that UK DC owners can use any ISP they wish. This is the very least that they could do. They are not going to support DreamArena for very long, are they?

2. Release the server code for the online games. This way anyone with a PC on the Net can setup a game server for DC gamers. The only problem, probably a big one given Sega's reluctance to spend money on the DC, would be that this may mean that some online games have to be tweaked and re-released so that they can dial-up and connect to any server, rather than Sega's own.

Maybe if they had taken this more open approach in the first place the DC may have fared a little better as a potential Internet access device for the masses. While they are at it, why don't they release a good-quality software development kit for

'We can rest assured that Microsoft will produce a machine of great power and build quality, unlike Sony's console, which is still suffering build problems'



Andy Tebay calls for Sega to release the Dreamcast link cable, as used with *Virtual On*, in Europe, and to support the dev community

the DC (not like Sony's Yaroze)? Base it around the GNU C compiler and debugger, release the Sega development libraries (old versions if they want), release a boot disc so that a PC and DC can communicate and a PC-to-DC serial cable.

The DC is still a powerful and capable machine. It may bring back the days of bedroom programmers, and maybe a bit of innovation where playability reigns supreme over graphics. They don't have to support it – just look at what has been achieved with unofficial homebrewed development kits. A whole community will develop and it will support itself.

Oh, and release the DC-to-DC link cable! The DC is now cheap enough that having two DCs and two copies of *F355* (or *Virtua On* on import) would be very attractive.

It's about time Sega gave something back to the people who have loyally supported their hardware platforms, from the Master System to the Dreamcast.

Andy Tebay, via email

The underground DC dev scene continues to grow, but sadly, as it stands, it looks like it will only continue to do so without Sega's support.

I have been following with interest the reports of Sony's PS2 struggles. I personally think that the main issue is that there are almost two different videogame markets and at the moment, and they struggle to co-exist.

The first is the traditional one (that I consider myself and probably most **Edge** readers to be a part of). The second market is the new consumer market that Sony pretty much created with the PlayStation. I know many people who own PlayStations but have no love of games, like I do. In fact the most common question they ask me about PS2 is can they get cheap copies of games (and they think I'm insane when I say that I don't agree with this), rather than whether or not there are any good games.

The problem Sony has is that the PS2 is not attractive to the traditional gamers because the game quality is not high enough to these fairly discerning buyers. To them the PlayStation brand has become synonymous with massmarket sequels and repeats of old ideas. They probably own a Dreamcast and will see no reason to buy a PS2, as the DC games are currently outstanding. So, what about the massmarket consumer? They are unlikely to shell out £350 either. Why would they? They can't get cheap copied games, they already have their PlayStation, and they probably only use it one or two hours a week now anyway. They see a PlayStation in the same way as a video recorder or CD player.

So, what can save PS2? My guess is it could well be Sega. If they knock out the quality for PS2 that they have been doing for the DC – and quickly – then the traditional gamer will start buying in. When the price then drops closer to the £100-£150 mark, the mass consumer might start getting interested, and if Sega help Sony get their online gaming to the standards that *Phantasy Star* has shown, then PS2 could well become a real contender.

What about XBox? Johnny Consumer still doesn't know about XBox. Nintendo? Johnny Consumer thinks it's for kids. Me? I'll have them all, thanks.

Chris Silk, via email

Of all the issues you note, cost seems the biggest barrier to any wannabe PS2 owner. A serious pre-Christmas price drop will surely be the catalyst in bringing in your old friend Johnny Consumer.

'It's about time Sega gave something back to the people who have loyally supported their hardware platforms, from the Master System to the Dreamcast'

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet

PeteL

Before GBA, how many people would have got more excited about a retro-tinged handheld than a proper boundary-breaking new powerhouse? Is it rational to be this excited about all these reissues, or is it just a sign of how disenchanted those gamers weaned on the likes of *Mario Kart* have become? Has the PS2 mess really made anxious nostalgia fiends of us all?

BlackSpy

How many Marios do you suppose can dance on the head of a pin?

Anders

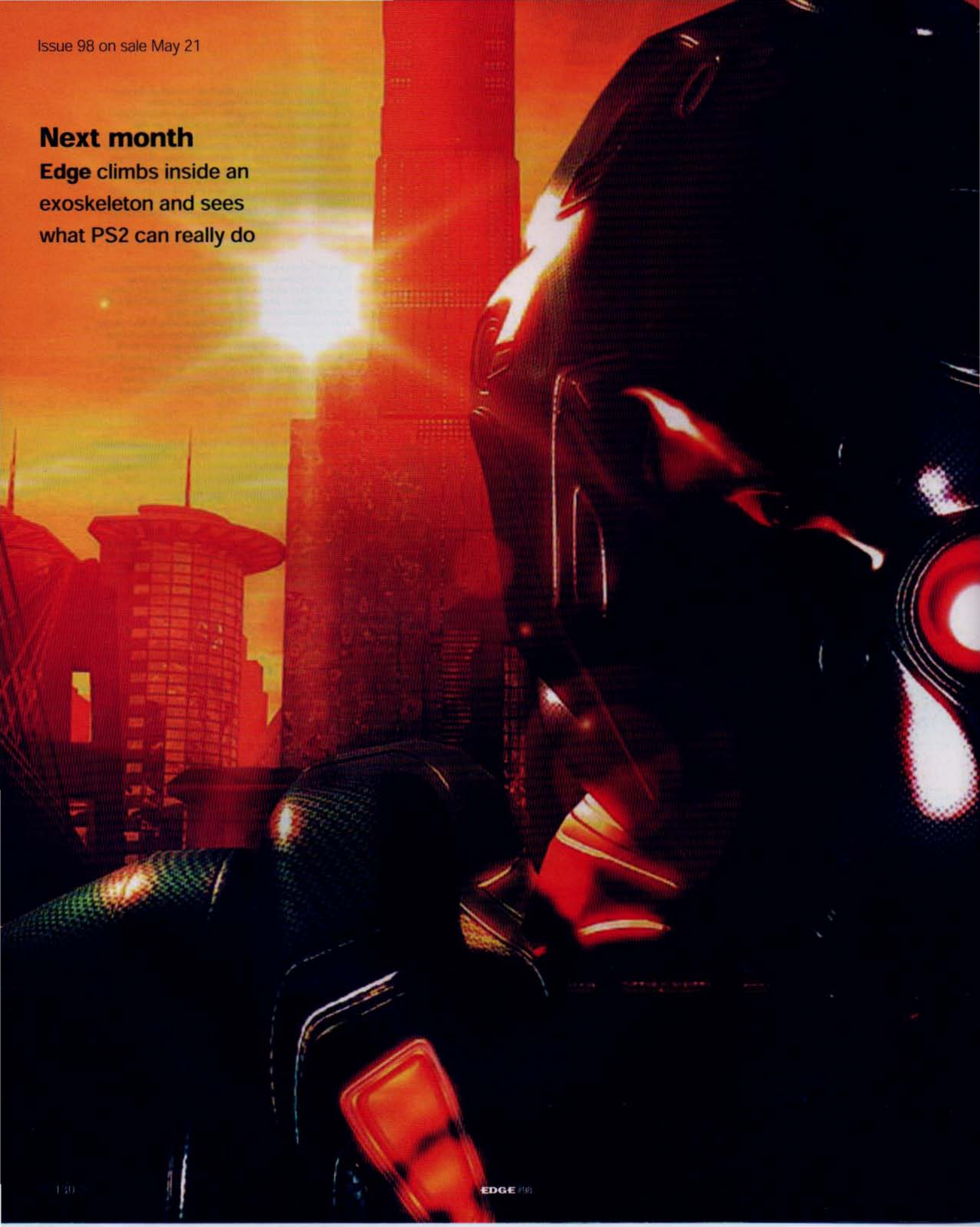
I have an idea for a new article series in **Edge**. How about 'What were you thinking?', where the intrepid **Edge** team asks developers just what they were thinking when they rush their latest PC titles out for Christmas (or just in general) with unplayable controls, missing features, clichéd gameplay, etc.

Nominees would be *Hitman*, *Mechwarrior 4*, *Delta Force 3* and *Severance: Blade of Darkness* (I refuse to believe that Severance was 5 years in the making, BTW. Scary).

Or why not a 'What were WE thinking?', when **Edge** casts a critical, introspective look at their old reviews. My suggestion for first article in this series would be the infamous *Blood 2* review. Seriously, guys, sometimes you really need to play the games before you cut and paste from the press release...

Toops

How does it feel to be inside the **Edge** letters section, you lucky git?



Next month

Edge climbs inside an exoskeleton and sees what PS2 can really do


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